NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC HISTORY

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ICONIC QUEEN OF EGYPT

SPARTA'S LAST STAND
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Today, those wishing to see the bust for themselves must visit the Neues Museum in Berlin. For nearly a century Egypt has been fighting for the Nefertiti bust's return, claiming the artifact was looted; Germany maintains it legally obtained the bust and has held on to it since 1913.

Debating ownership of history's great objects is not new, but it has grown louder as the world begins to reckon with the legacy of colonialism. Most agree ancient treasures should be protected and studied, but cannot agree on who should possess relics like the Parthenon's marbles, the Ishtar Gate, the Rosetta stone, and the Benin Bronzes (to name a few).

Easy answers in the repatriation debate are difficult to find. From the cultures who created them to the circumstances of their discovery, their paths to museum collections, and the tourism they generate today, each of these objects need their full transparent histories told before anyone enters the fray.

Amy Briggs

Amy Briggs,
Executive Editor

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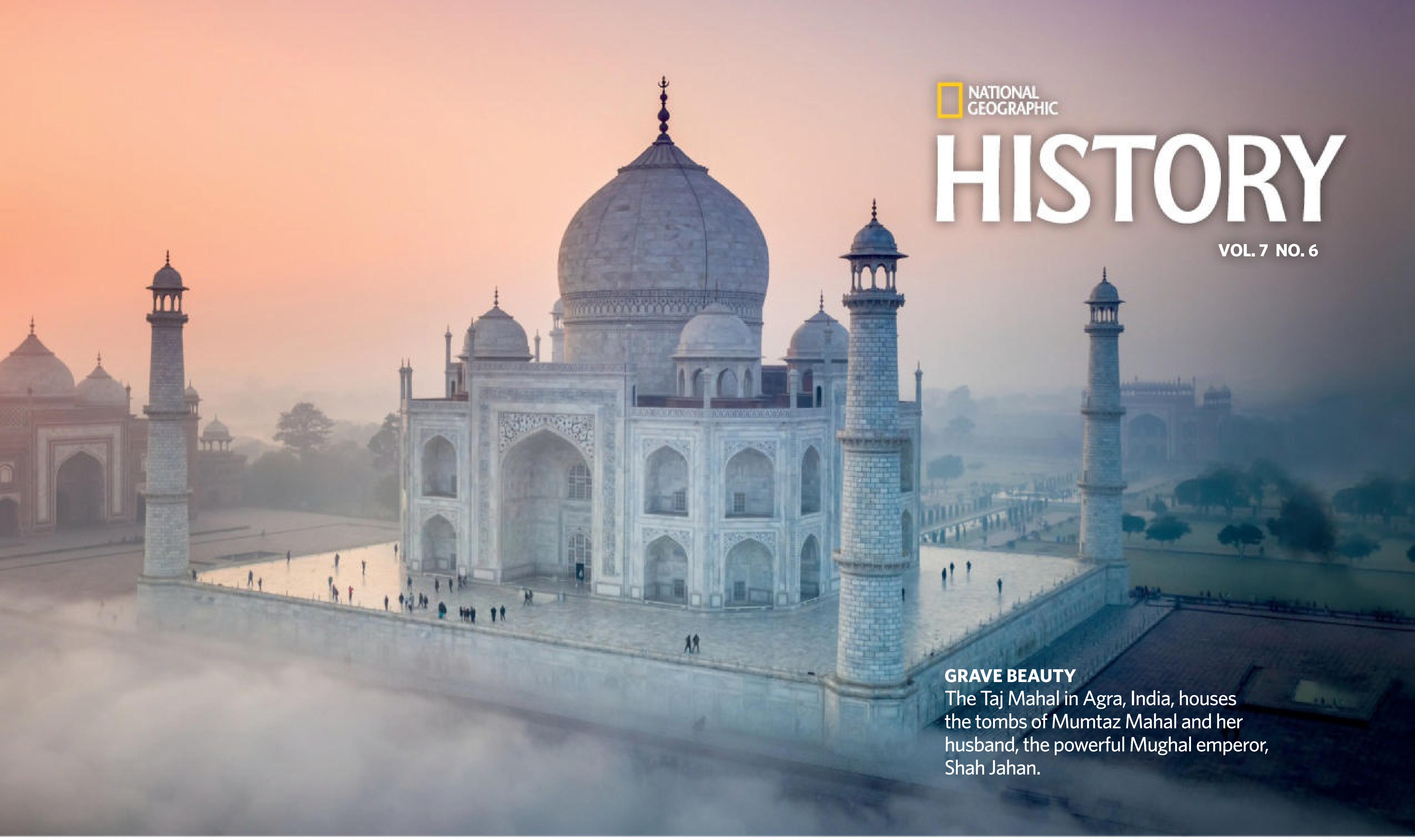

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
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GRAVE BEAUTY
The Taj Mahal in Agra, India, houses the tombs of Mumtaz Mahal and her husband, the powerful Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan.

Features

18 Stone Age Venuses

As Europe shivered through the Ice Age, artisans carved tiny figurines of women. Initially dubbed "Venuses" by the scholars who uncovered them, the artworks' function is still being debated.

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Great royal wife to the pharaoh Akhenaten, Nefertiti has long been celebrated as a beauty icon, but today's Egyptologists are exploring another dimension of her life—her role as a powerbroker.

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On a summer morning in 480 B.C., an elite band of Spartans stood firm before the mighty Persian army, enabling their allies to escape. All were hacked down in an act of heroism that has echoed down the ages.

62 Peru's Royal Time Capsule

Inside an intact tomb at El Castillo de Huarmey, Peru, archaeologists found a queenly burial brimming with treasures from the mysterious Wari empire that ruled 1,200 years ago.

76 Romance of the Taj Mahal

Grieving his dear wife Mumtaz Mahal, Mughal ruler Shah Jahan built her a magnificent white marble mausoleum. Completed in the 1600s, India's Taj Mahal is one of the world's most beloved sites.

SEATED WARI LORD. CA 800 A.D., EL CASTILLO DE HUARMEY, PERU

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Ellen Craft and her husband's daring escape from slavery happened in broad daylight, thanks to her ability to disguise herself—as a white man.

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The humble catfish was revered by Egypt's earliest pharaohs, who aligned themselves with this creature who embodied survival, strength, and new life.

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It took centuries for forks to find their place at the table. Medieval diners thought them pretentious, but forks became common by the 19th century.

16 WORK OF ART

Who wore the golden pectoral of Monte Albán is hotly debated. Its Mixtec iconography has led scholars to differing identifications of its original owner.

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Archaeologists flew an airplane over 1930s Iran to locate the source of intricately crafted ancient bronzes. They found it in Luristan where many more Iron Age artifacts were unearthed.

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Photography Editor MERITXELL CASANOVAS

Contributors
JEREMY BERLIN, TONI CABRE, MARC BRIAN DUCKETT, BRADEN PHILLIPS,
SEAN PHILPOTTS, SARAH PRESANT-COLLINS, STEPH SELICE,
THEODORE A. SICKLEY, JANE SUNDERLAND, ROSEMARY WARDLEY

VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER JOHN MACKETHAN

Advertising ROB BYRNES

Consumer Marketing and Planning JINA CHOI, ANDREW DIAMOND,
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MARK VIOLA, JANET ZAVREL

Production Services JAMES ANDERSON, JULIE IBINSON, KRISTIN SEMENIUK
Customer Service SCOTT ARONSON, TRACY PELT, CHRISTINA SHORTER

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EVP & GM, MEDIA GROUP, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PARTNERS DAVID E. MILLER
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PARTNERS AKILESH SRIDHARAN
DEPUTY CHIEF COUNSEL, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PARTNERS EVELYN T. MILLER

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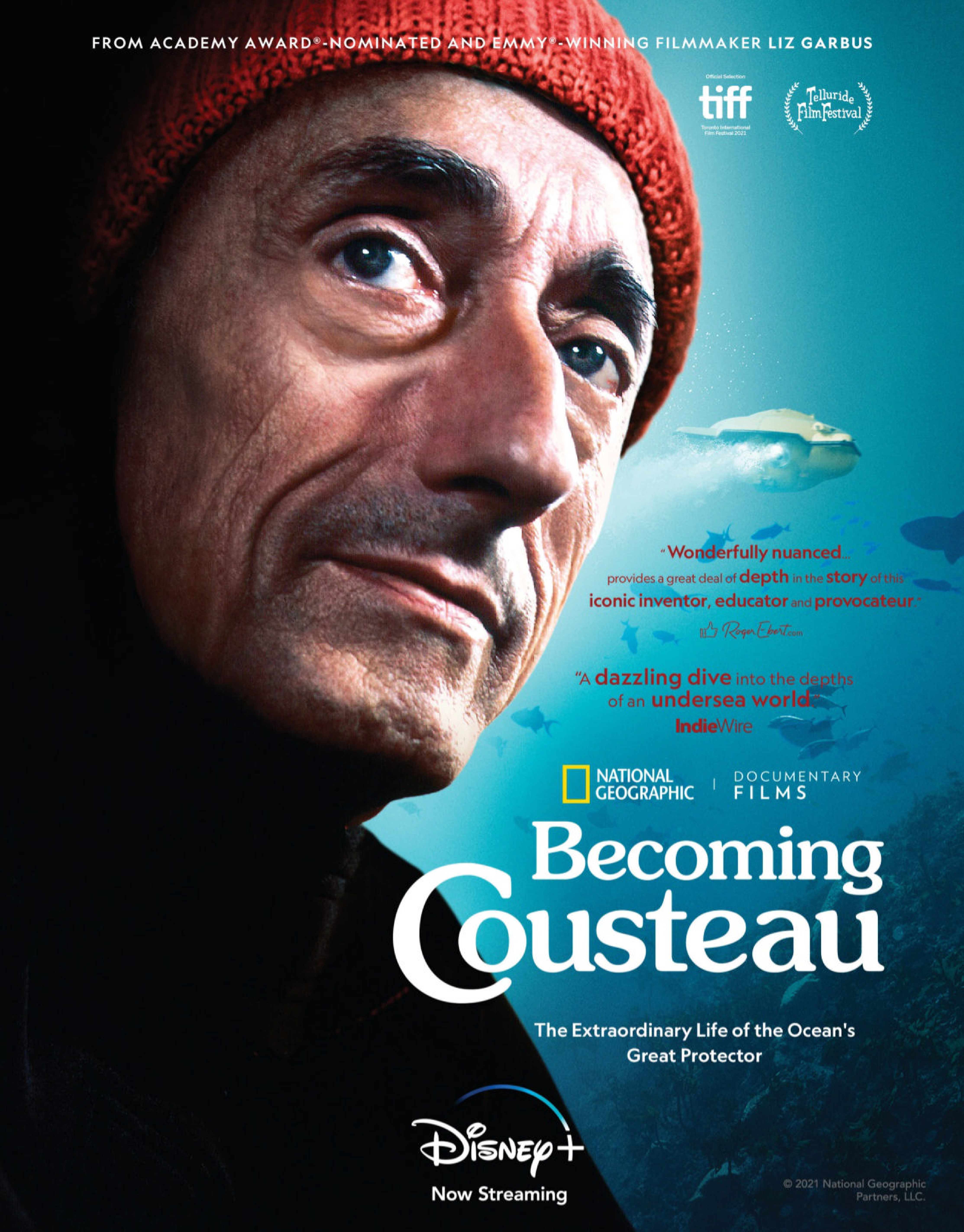
National Geographic History (ISSN 2380-3878) is published bimonthly in January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December by National Geographic Partners, LLC, 1145 17th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Volume 7, Number 6. $34 per year for U.S. delivery. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. **SUBSCRIBER:** If the Postal Service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *National Geographic History*, P.O. Box 37545, Boone, IA, 50037. In Canada, agreement number 1000010298, return undeliverable Canadian addresses to *National Geographic History*, P.O Box 819 STN Main, Markham, ON L3P 9Z9.



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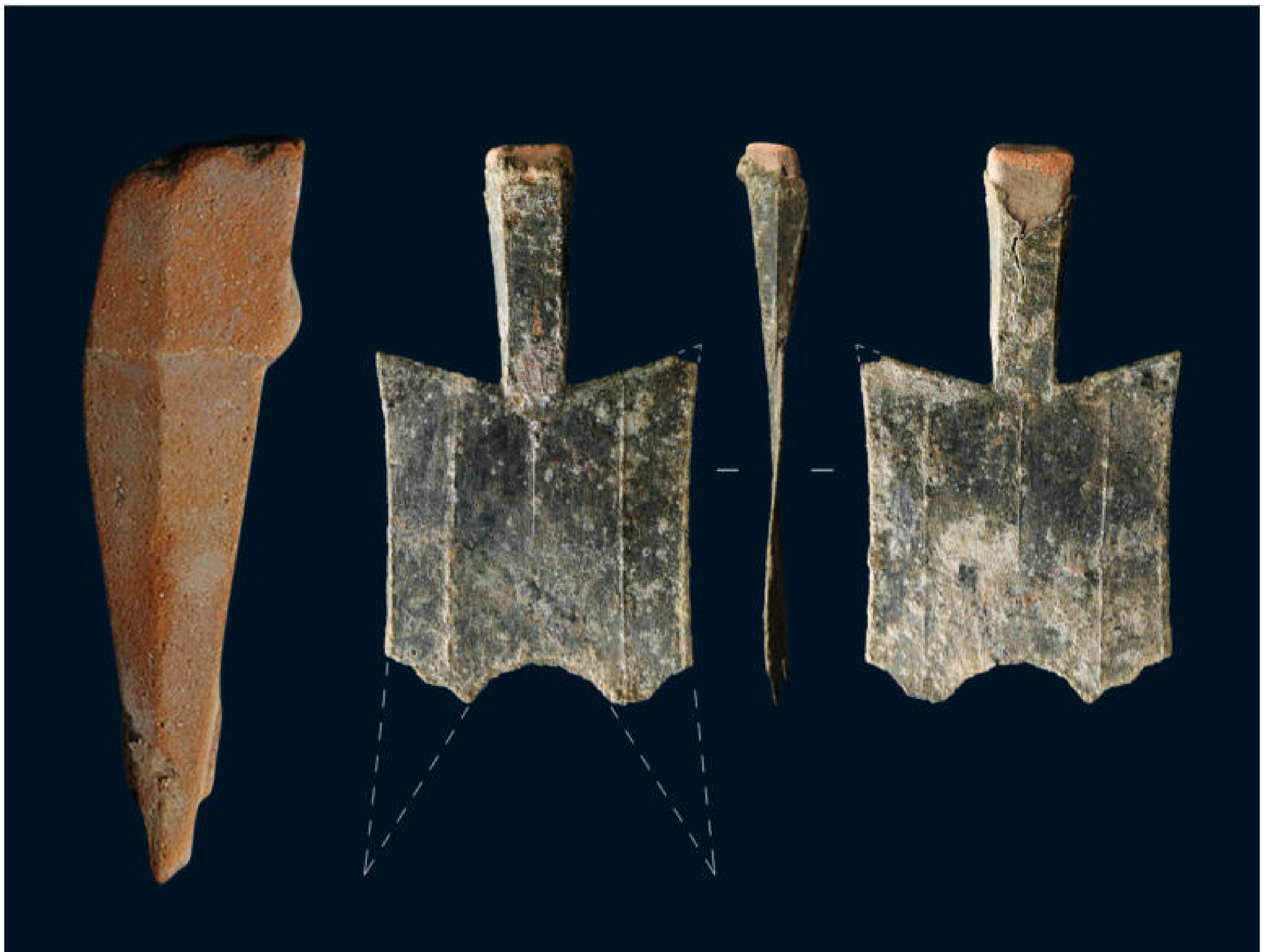
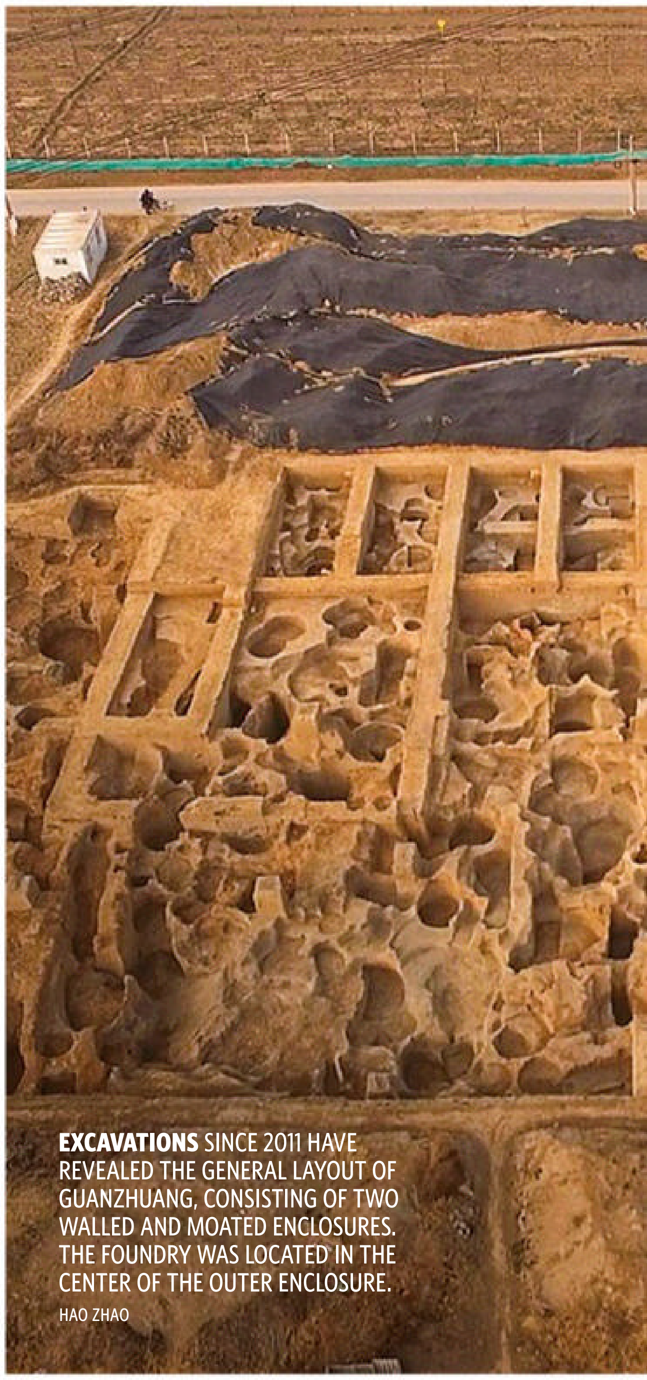
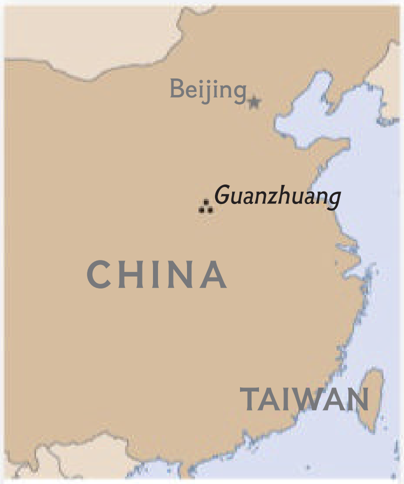


THE DISCOVERY of the ancient mint at Guanzhuang has yielded both spade coins and the clay molds used to make them. To produce such spade coins (like the one above, whose points have been lost since its casting), craftsmen made two clay outer molds (not shown). A clay core (far left, at a much larger scale than the coins) was placed between the outer molds to create the cavity for the spade's hollow "handle." The outer molds were then tied together around the core, and molten bronze poured in. A core, still filling the "handle," is visible in the coin above.
HAO ZHAO



EXCAVATIONS SINCE 2011 HAVE REVEALED THE GENERAL LAYOUT OF GUANZHUANG, CONSISTING OF TWO WALLED AND MOATED ENCLOSURES. THE FOUNDRY WAS LOCATED IN THE CENTER OF THE OUTER ENCLOSURE.
HAO ZHAO



NG MAPS

PROTECTED BY walls and a moat, the ancient city of Guanzhuang was an important center of the Zheng State, a vassal of the Zhou dynasty. Established around 800 B.C., the city was abandoned around 450 B.C.

CHINESE COINS

2,600-Year-Old Mint Was Earliest to Make Money

An ancient Chinese foundry, located in today's Henan Province, was manufacturing bronze coins decades before other civilizations.

Chinese archaeologists announced the discovery of the world's oldest mint, adding a new chapter to the history of money. Located at the site of Guanzhuang, an ancient city in China's eastern Henan Province, the factory was mass-producing bronze coins between 640 and 550 B.C.

Prior to the discovery, the earliest mint was believed to be in Lydia (in modern Turkey), dating to between 575 B.C. and 550 B.C. The team of Chinese scholars used radio carbon dating to confirm the Guanzhuang factory's age.

"The minting techniques employed at Guanzhuang are characterized by batch production and a high degree of standardization," wrote Hao Zhao, an archaeologist at Zhengzhou University, who led the research team. Reported in the journal *Antiquity,* their excavation uncovered all the elements of manufacture, including coins, molds, and clay cores. "The production of spade coins was

not a small-scale, sporadic experiment, but rather a well-planned and organized process."

Many early Chinese coins, like the ones minted at the Guanzhuang site, were shaped like small spades. The Guanzhuang coins are not as old as coins from Lydia, the researchers note, and these are not the first Chinese spade coins to have been found.

Question of Value

Most scholars who study the origins of ancient money believe that minting was pioneered in three different regions—Lydia, China, and India—but there is debate about where coinage and minting were invented. Even these recent findings in China have not settled arguments about which civilization did it first.

Of greater importance than the "who came first" debate, is the academic question of how monetary value was determined and held by people in these different societies. Until recently, conventional thinking about the history of money was based on Lydian coins, whose value was derived from their composition (their coins were made of precious metals), and backed by a stamp that guaranteed its composition.

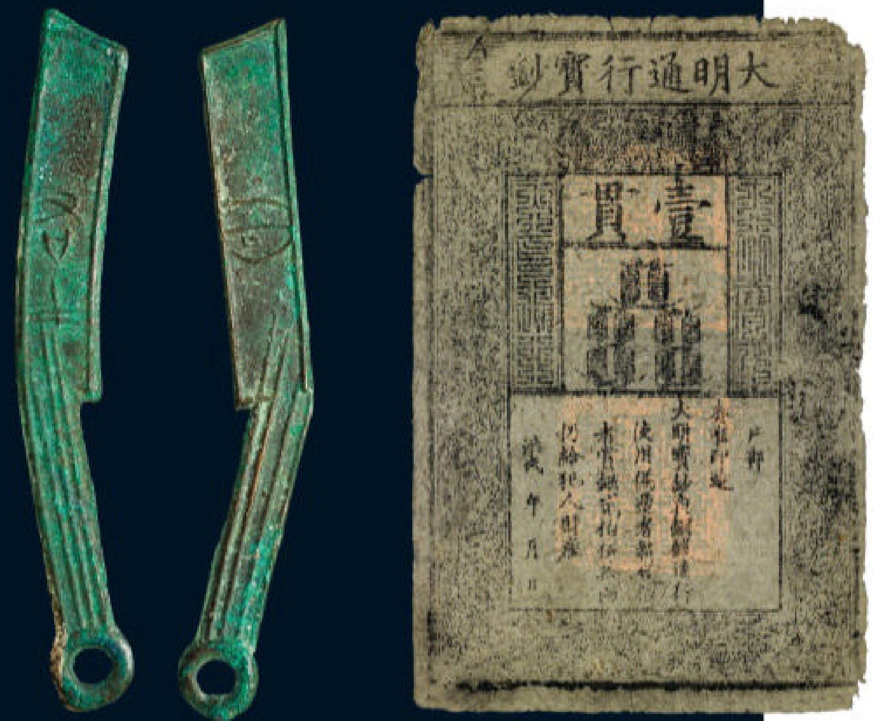
"Chinese coinage is fundamentally different, and we need to take that into account to understand the history of coinage," said Lyce Jankowski, a numismatist specializing in East Asian coinage and curator at the Royal Museum of Mariemont in Belgium (Jankowski was not part of the Guanzhuang research team). "The spade is not supported by any metallic value. You have neither the name of the ruler, nor . . . the state. In that sense, since its creation, Chinese coinage has a 'fiduciary' element in it."

The Guanzhuang archaeologists theorize that the trust, or "fiduciary" element in the spade coin came from the group affiliated with the foundry, be it "merchant groups, a local authority or even the . . . Zheng State."

—*Braden Phillips*

PAPER REVOLUTION

CHINA'S EARLIEST CURRENCY was not coins or paper, but cowrie shells. Advances in metallurgy around 1000 B.C. led to the first bronze coins, which took the form of valuable tools, such as knives or spades. Round coins appeared in the fourth century B.C., made from base metals. The Chinese fiduciary system contrasted with the Mediterranean world, whose coins were made from gold and silver that underwrote their value. In imperial China confidence that bronze coins would be accepted was established through a parallel currency of gold ingots. In the 11th century a copper shortage led the Song dynasty to adopt promissory notes of the kind used by merchants, a development that led to the world's first paper banknotes. The Yuan and early Ming dynasties in the 13th and 14th centuries would also use paper notes, making China the world's first society to run a fully fledged paper economy.



LEFT: CHINESE KNIFE COINS, FIFTH TO THIRD CENTURIES B.C. ALAMY
RIGHT: A 14TH-CENTURY BANKNOTE, MING DYNASTY SCALA, FLORENCE

Ellen Craft, the Appearance of Freedom

Born into slavery, Ellen Craft and her husband, William, rejected that fate for their children. Escaping from Georgia to Pennsylvania, the couple used her white skin to hide in plain sight.

In the 1800s many enslaved people in the United States, especially those who lived in the Deep South, made valiant efforts to escape to freedom in the north. Many of the most well-known stories, like that of Harriet Tubman and the people she helped ferry along the Underground Railroad, took place under the cover of darkness to avoid slave patrols and other local authorities, but Ellen Craft and her husband, William, took a different approach. Their daring escape took place in the broad light of day.

The Organizers

Ellen Craft was born in 1826 in Clinton, Georgia. Her father, Col. James Smith, was a white man and her first enslaver. Her mother, Maria, an African American woman, was also owned by Smith. Ellen was fair-skinned and resembled Smith and the children of his marriage, so much so that people frequently mistook her for one of them.

Tradition says that it was this resemblance that led to Ellen's owner giving her at age 11 to his daughter, Ellen's half sister, as a wedding gift in 1837. Young Ellen went to live in Macon, Georgia, about 15 miles from where she was born. She worked as a maid there.

History did not record when and how Ellen met the man who became her husband, William Craft. He was born in rural Georgia in 1824. The same person enslaved his entire family, but cruelly separated them through the course of William's childhood. In his memoir, William recalled: "My old master also sold a dear brother and a sister, in the same manner as he did my father and mother. The reason he assigned for disposing of my parents, as well as of several other aged slaves, was, that 'they were getting old, and would soon become valueless in the market.'"

William himself was sold at age 16. He had been apprenticed to a cabinetmaker as a child, and his skills were so strong that his new owner hired him out as a carpenter to other slaveholders. William was paid for this work, and, despite his owner collecting most of his earnings,

Journey to Liberty

1826

Ellen Craft is born in Clinton, Georgia, the daughter of a white slave owner and a Black enslaved woman.

1837

Ellen is separated from her mother when she is sent to Macon, Georgia, as a wedding present for her white half sister.

1846

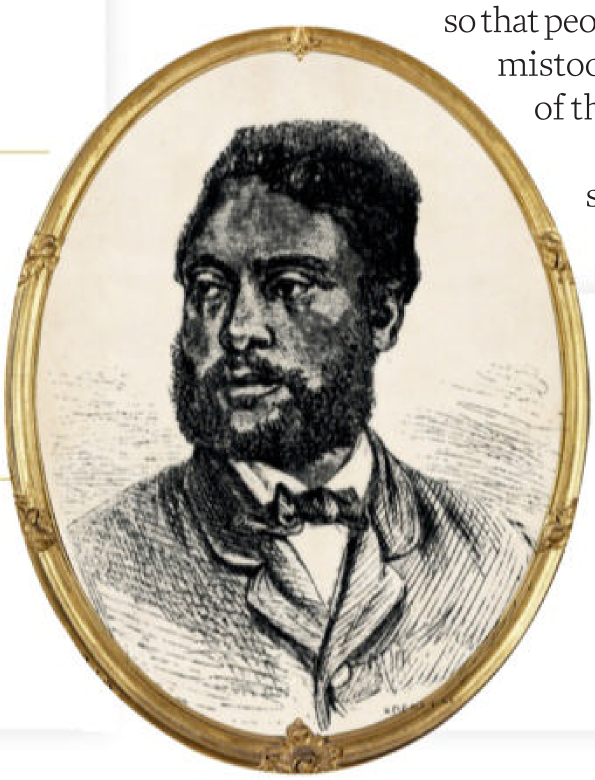
Ellen marries William Craft, an enslaved cabinetmaker who belongs to another household in Macon.

1848

Unwilling to have children while enslaved, the Crafts plan an escape to the northern free states.

1850

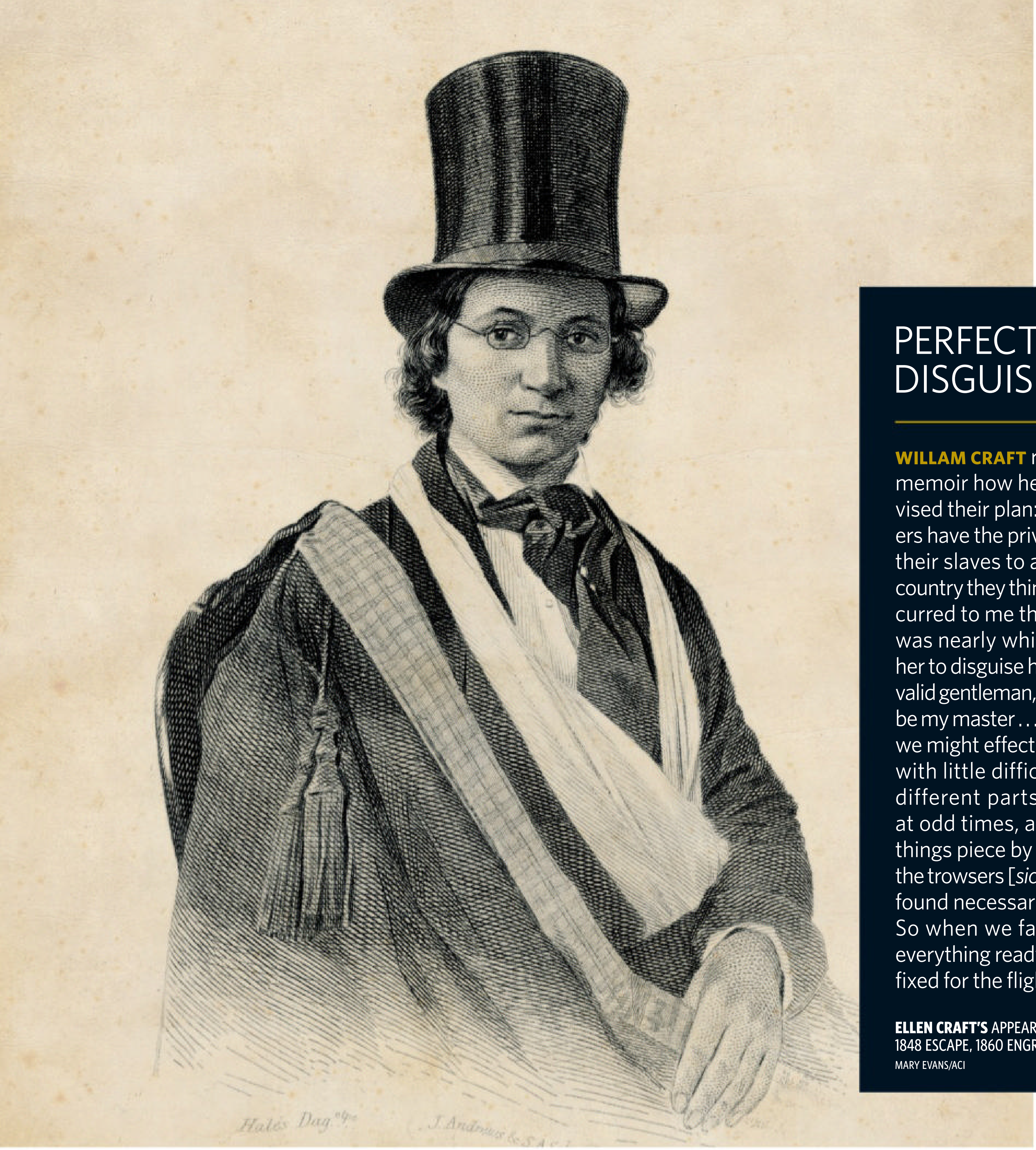
After passage of the Fugitive Slave Act endangers their freedom, the Crafts move to England.



WILLIAM CRAFT, 1840S PORTRAIT

FOTOSEARCH/GETTY IMAGES

> "[A]s my wife was nearly white, I might get her to disguise herself as an invalid gentleman, and assume to be my master."



PERFECT DISGUISE

WILLAM CRAFT recalled in his memoir how he and Ellen devised their plan: "[S]laveholders have the privilege of taking their slaves to any part of the country they think proper, it occurred to me that, as my wife was nearly white, I might get her to disguise herself as an invalid gentleman, and assume to be my master . . . in this manner we might effect our escape . . . with little difficulty I went to different parts of the town, at odd times, and purchased things piece by piece, (except the trowsers [*sic*] which [Ellen] found necessary to make,) . . . So when we fancied we had everything ready the time was fixed for the flight."

ELLEN CRAFT'S APPEARANCE DURING HER 1848 ESCAPE, 1860 ENGRAVING

MARY EVANS/ACI

he was allowed to keep a small portion of his wages for himself. Though Ellen and William were considered property and still enslaved, they had privileges. Among them was obtaining passes from their owners, allowing them to leave their homes and travel to places around Macon.

Careful Plans

The Crafts married in 1846 but were concerned about starting a family. Owing to the traumas of family separation in their youth, they wisely feared being separated from their own children. The only way they could build a family and a future together was to escape Georgia. At the time, the state held one of the largest populations of enslaved people in the country, so any plans to escape would need to be cautious and clever.

Knowing the difficulties of trying to escape during the night, the two had devised a plan to outsmart enslavers and slave patrols. They would travel by day to the northern states using Ellen's fair skin to hide in plain sight. Ellen would pose as William's owner, but the two quickly recognized that people would be skeptical of a white woman traveling alone with a Black man. They decided Ellen would pose as a young white man.

She began by cutting her hair short and dressing in men's clothing. She donned a top hat and green spectacles to cover the fear in her eyes because she was anxious of someone catching them along the trip. Ellen also applied a poultice to her face to cover the fact that she lacked facial hair.

Neither William nor Ellen had learned to read or write as it was illegal in the state of Georgia to teach an enslaved person how. This led to them bandaging Ellen's arm as well to prevent her from having to sign any of the registration papers for travel or lodging. If they were asked by anyone why they were traveling up north, their story was that they were going to see a special doctor, whereby the bandages would indicate injury or disease.

MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY
AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE

AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE in Beacon Hill, Boston, Massachusetts, where the Crafts spoke of their escape

RANDY DUCHAINE/ALAMY

Trains, Carriages, and Boats

On December 21, 1848, Ellen and William began their journey. After first obtaining passes to leave their residences, they disguised themselves, made their way to the Macon train station, and departed for Savannah, Georgia. On the train, Ellen realized she was sitting next to a dear friend of her owner. Anxious and fearful, she relaxed after he spoke to her and said, “It is a very fine morning, sir.” Although she was relieved that her disguise was working, Ellen acted as if she was deaf for the remainder of the train ride to avoid conversing with him.

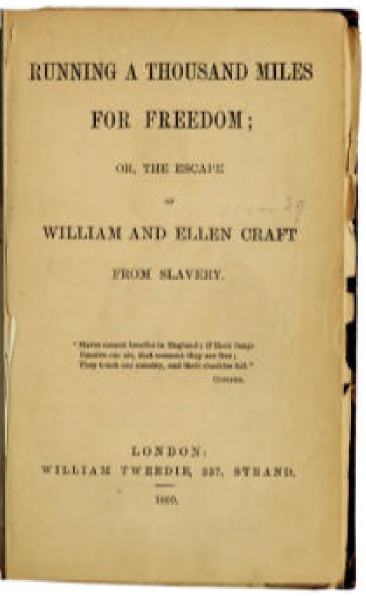
Once they arrived in Savannah, they found a carriage and quickly made their way to a steamboat departing for Charleston, South Carolina. There was no seating on the boat for enslaved people, so William found a spot near the funnel of the ship where he sat until morning. The next morning, the captain was thoroughly impressed at the young master’s “very attentive boy” and warned Ellen to beware of “cut-throat abolitionists” in the northern states who would entice William to run away.

The trip was full of fraught encounters: A slave trader made Ellen an offer to buy William and to take him to the Deep South. A military officer scolded her for saying “thank you” to William. When the couple arrived in Charleston, they were able to stay at the best hotel in town. There, the clerks greeted the “invalid” with great care, giving them a nice room and good table in the dining hall.

From Charleston, they took another steamboat to Wilmington, North Carolina, and from there, a train to

TALES OF FREEDOM

IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES, Black authors published personal accounts of their lives as enslaved people and their escapes. Known popularly as slave narratives, these important works—penned by esteemed authors like the Crafts, Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Jacobs—were an important part in exposing the horrors of slavery and ending the practice in the United States.



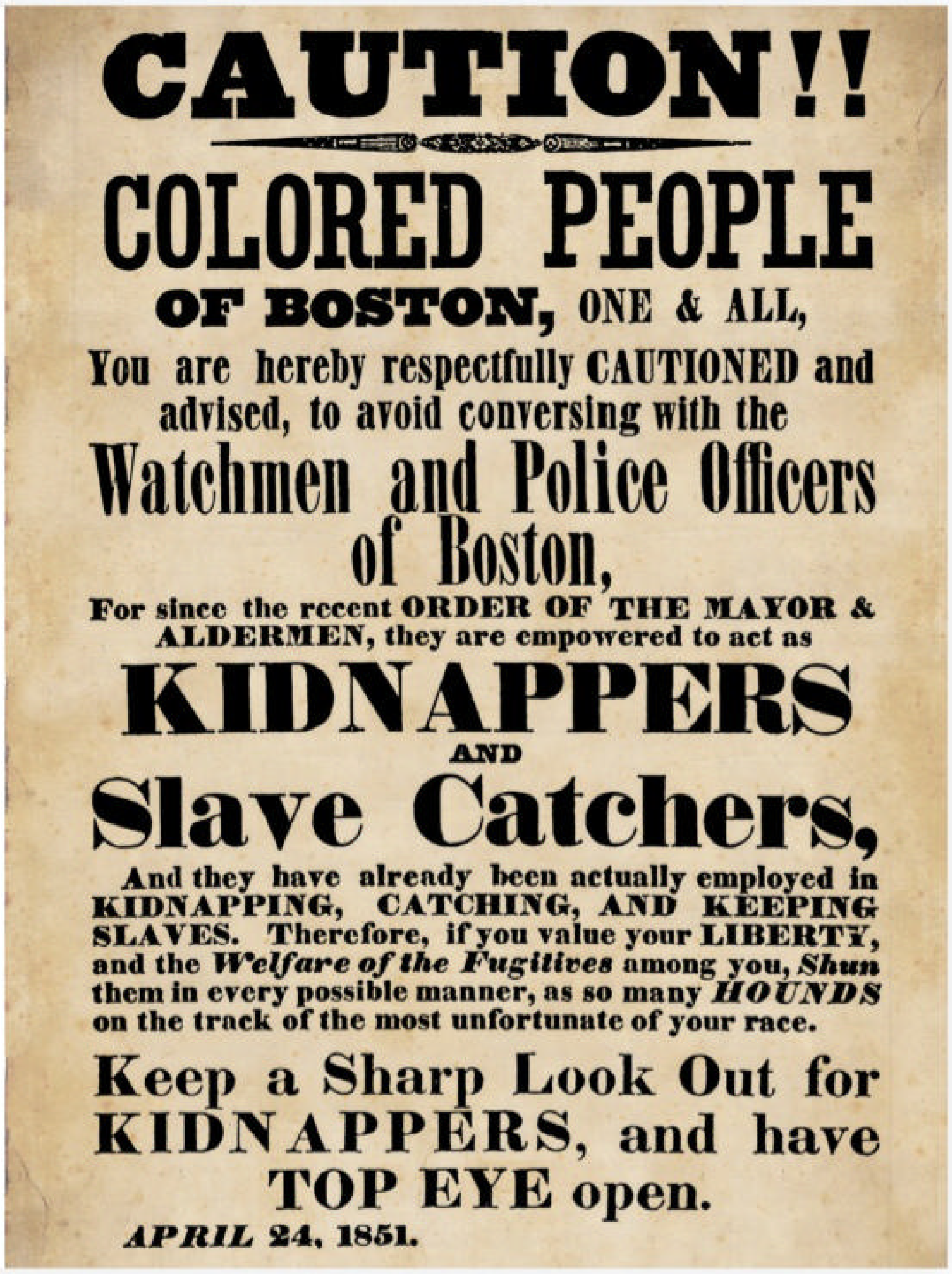
RUNNING A THOUSAND MILES
FOR FREEDOM;
OR, THE ESCAPE
OF
WILLIAM AND ELLEN CRAFT
FROM SLAVERY.

LONDON:
WILLIAM TWEEDIE, 337, STRAND.
1860.

FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT OF 1850

MASSACHUSETTS was a free state—slavery had been banned for more than 60 years—but passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 threatened its free Black citizens, like the Crafts. The law appeared to strengthen an existing clause in the U.S. Constitution that said enslaved people who escaped to a free state did not automatically become free; they could be seized and returned to slaveholders. The 1850 act stripped away northern states' power over any of these cases and gave it to federal commissioners, who were paid $10 for every person they seized. Anyone who helped Black people avoid capture could be fined or imprisoned.

THE ACT ITSELF was a misguided effort to bolster slavery during a time when slaveholding states' power was diminishing. The act had the opposite effect; it generated a massive backlash in the northern states, where citizens saw it as federal overreach and demanded stronger state protections for personal liberty. The abolition movement gained momentum, and the battle over slavery waged hotter than ever.



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AND

Slave Catchers,

And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the *Welfare of the Fugitives* among you, *Shun* them in every possible manner, as so many *HOUNDS* on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.

APRIL 24, 1851.

1851 BROADSIDE WARNS BOSTON CITIZENS TO BE ON THEIR GUARD AGAINST SLAVE CATCHERS.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY

Richmond, Virginia. When they reached Baltimore, Maryland, on December 24, 1848, the couple was one stop away from freedom in Pennsylvania. The Crafts had learned of conductors prohibiting enslaved people from traveling to Philadelphia. A Baltimore conductor did halt them momentarily to validate that William "belonged" to Ellen. Another conductor, seeing Ellen's bandages, intervened and allowed them to board the train. They were on their way. On Christmas Day, the Crafts made it to Philadelphia. Ellen cried out: "Thank God, William, we're safe!"

Farther to Freedom

Ellen and William stayed in Philadelphia for a short time. Less than a month after arriving the two moved to a free Black community in Boston, Massachusetts, a hotbed of abolitionist activity in the United States. Luminaries such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison were among the leaders of the movement.

In Boston tales of their daring escape from Georgia earned them great respect. They quickly became loud voices in the abolitionist movement and traveled around New England to speak out about the horrors of slavery down south.

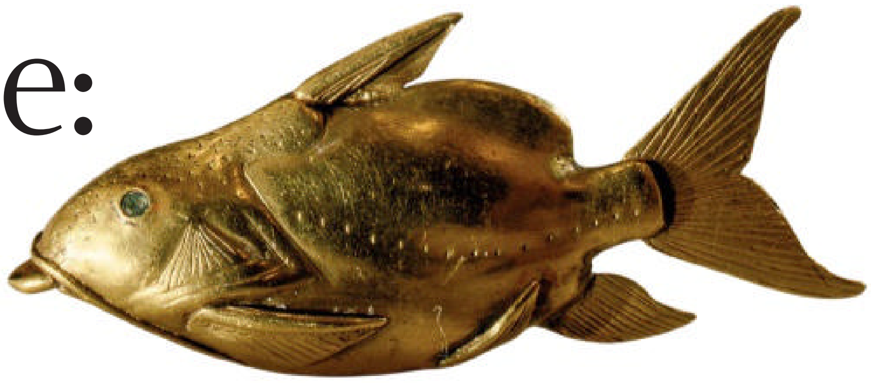
Ellen and William's beginnings in Boston seemed promising. William returned to being a successful cabinetmaker, and Ellen worked as a seamstress. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made their lives uneasy. The law made it illegal for residents of free states, like Massachusetts, to harbor or aid, fugitive slaves. It also made it possible for federal officials to seize suspected escapees and send them back, without any trial.

Lucrative rewards were made for capturing suspected escaped enslaved people. The Crafts found themselves targets of bounty hunters from Macon, Georgia. Willis Hughes and John Knight attempted to capture the Crafts in Boston. An interracial group of Bostonians, called the Vigilance Committee, protected Ellen and William. They moved them to different safe houses around Boston (and even outside the city), to prevent them from being captured.

The Fugitive Slave Act's threat of kidnapping made it impossible for the Crafts to stay in the United States. To protect themselves, Ellen and William moved to London, England, where they became leading voices in the antislavery movement there. William authored a book about their experiences, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*. After spending nearly two decades in England and having five children, the Crafts returned to Georgia. They settled near Savannah, where they opened a farm school to educate newly freed Black students.

—*Tucker Toole*

Catfish of the Nile: Whiskered Icon of Egypt



UPSIDE-DOWN CATFISH GOLDEN PENDANT. CA 1878-1749 B.C. ROYAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND, EDINBURGH

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

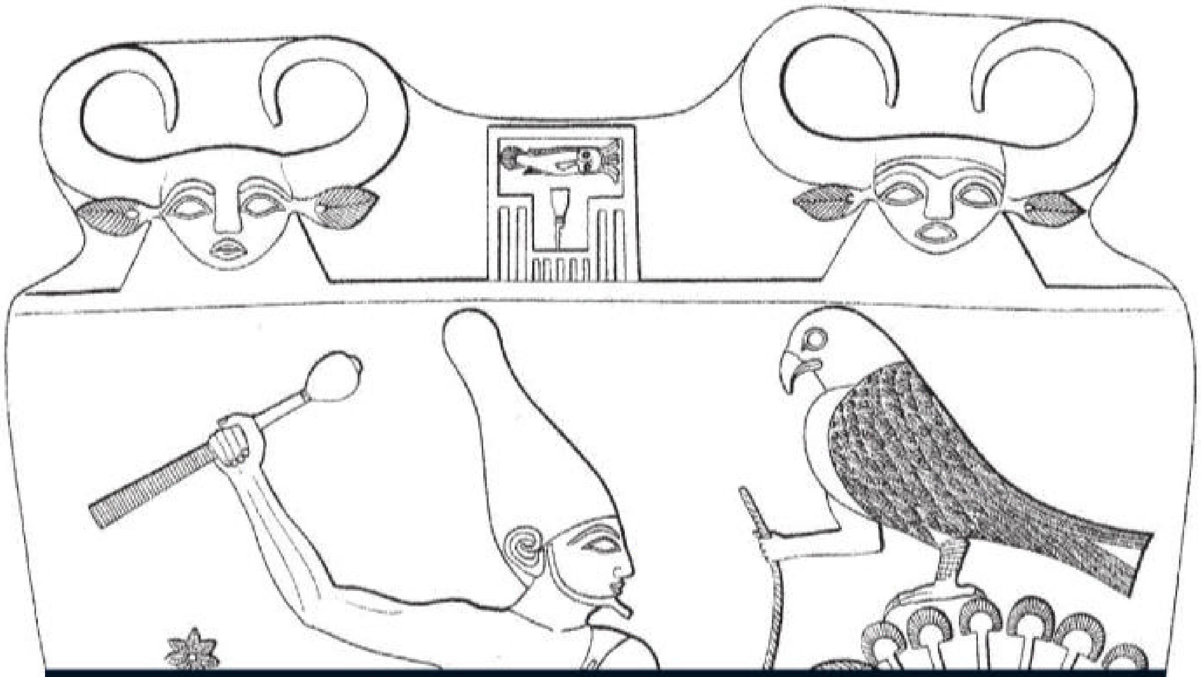
At the dawn of ancient Egypt, the remarkable catfish occupied an important part in Egyptian cosmology. Its survival abilities became a symbol of both power and protection.

Cobras, cats, and vultures are among the most popular animals depicted in Egyptian art, but the humble catfish once reigned supreme in the iconography of the civilization by the Nile. Common to every continent except Antarctica, catfish are the most diverse group of fish on earth. The 2,000 to 3,000 species have some remarkable characteristics, so it is little wonder they attracted the attention of the Egyptians, one of the most animal-conscious ancient cultures.

Named for its feline-like whiskers, called barbels, a catfish has finely honed senses that allow it to survive and find food in murky, muddy waters. One family of catfish has a respiratory system that allows it to use atmospheric oxygen. This is most spectacularly employed by the walking catfish *(Clarias batrachus),* familiar today as an invasive species in Florida, which uses its fins to waddle over land.

The ancient Egyptians had intimate knowledge of the several species of catfish that they observed among the rich life of the Nile River. Individual species are often clearly identifiable in Egyptian art and iconography.

A gold pendant (above) from the early second millennium B.C. is so naturalistic, it can be easily identified as the upside-down catfish, *Synodontis batensoda,* whose "flipped" orientation allows it to position its mouth close to the water's surface, from where it appears to be swimming upside down.



THE NARMER PALETTE CELEBRATES THE MIGHT OF ITS NAMESAKE, NARMER. ABOVE THE FIGURE OF THE PHARAOH IS HIS ROYAL NAME, SPELLED WITH THE HIEROGLYPHS FOR "CATFISH" AND "CHISEL." THE SAME SIGNATURE APPEARS ON THE REVERSE SIDE AS WELL. CA 3000 B.C. EGYPTIAN MUSEUM, CAIRO

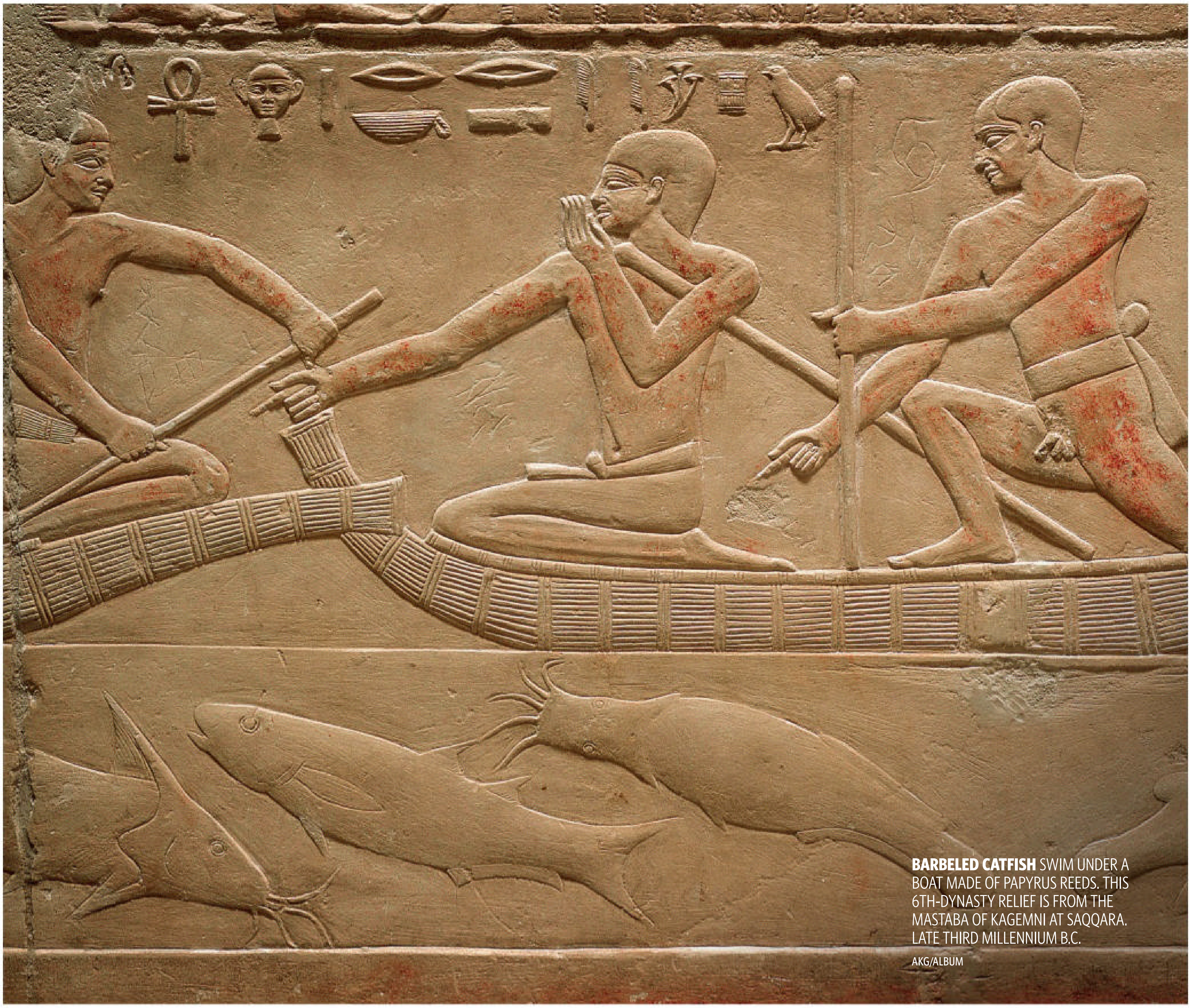
ALAMY/ACI

Catfish for Kings

Most of the animals associated with ancient Egypt were popular in the iconography of the New Kingdom (1539-1075 B.C.). The humble catfish was an icon thousands of years before then, during the Middle and Old Kingdoms and even the Predynastic Period.

The catfish's use as icon can be traced back to one of the oldest Egyptian artifacts, the Narmer Palette. Around 3000 B.C., Narmer is said to have led Upper Egypt in its conquest of Lower Egypt, thereby uniting the land and founding Egypt's 1st dynasty. The palette depicts Narmer striking down an enemy with a mace; archaeologists know the victorious figure is Narmer because his name appears above him. It consists of two hieroglyphs: *n'r* (catfish) and *mr* (chisel).

In their names, pharaohs would attempt to align themselves with the kind of wild animals that would command respect. "The aggressive, controlling power of wild animals is a common theme in elite of the late Predynastic Period," wrote Egyptologist Toby A.H. Wilkinson. "Within the belief-system of the late Predynastic Period, the catfish was evidently viewed as a symbol of domination and control, an ideal motif with which to associate the king."



BARBELED CATFISH SWIM UNDER A BOAT MADE OF PAPYRUS REEDS. THIS 6TH-DYNASTY RELIEF IS FROM THE MASTABA OF KAGEMNI AT SAQQARA. LATE THIRD MILLENNIUM B.C.

AKG/ALBUM

Catfish were depicted on several significant tomb reliefs from this early period. One of the most well known is the mastaba of Ty, a 5th-dynasty noble whose tomb in Saqqara features several friezes of catfish and fishermen. Another example is the mastaba of Kagemni, vizier to the 6th-dynasty king Teti, at Saqqara. A relief in this tomb depicts a fishing scene in which men in papyrus skiffs appear to be pursuing fish of different types, including whiskery catfish.

Fishy Symbols

Many species of catfish live in the Nile. The one on the Narmer Palette has been identified as belonging to the genus *Heterobranchus*. Another type of catfish, *Malapterurus electricus,* the electric catfish, was, very literally, a source of shock and awe to Egyptians: Its maximum charge of 350 volts can stun prey and deter predators, and deliver a nonlethal but painful shock to humans. Its representation on Old Kingdom reliefs of fishermen are the world's earliest known depictions of these creatures.

Egyptians attributed rich symbolic and mythological roles to the catfish. The upside-down catfish especially was imbued with symbolic importance. Belly-up on the surface, it appeared dead but was clearly alive, suggesting regeneration. Amulets of these creatures have been found throughout Old and Middle Kingdom sites in Egypt. These objects, it was believed, prevented drowning and were worn as necklaces or as hair ornaments.

The catfish's ability to navigate the murky bottom of the Nile seemed to give it magical qualities. The Egyptians believed that the catfish could guide the solar bark that bore the sun disk through the darkness of the underworld. Since the underworld was conceived of as a watery realm, the catfish could continue to protect people after death as well as in life.

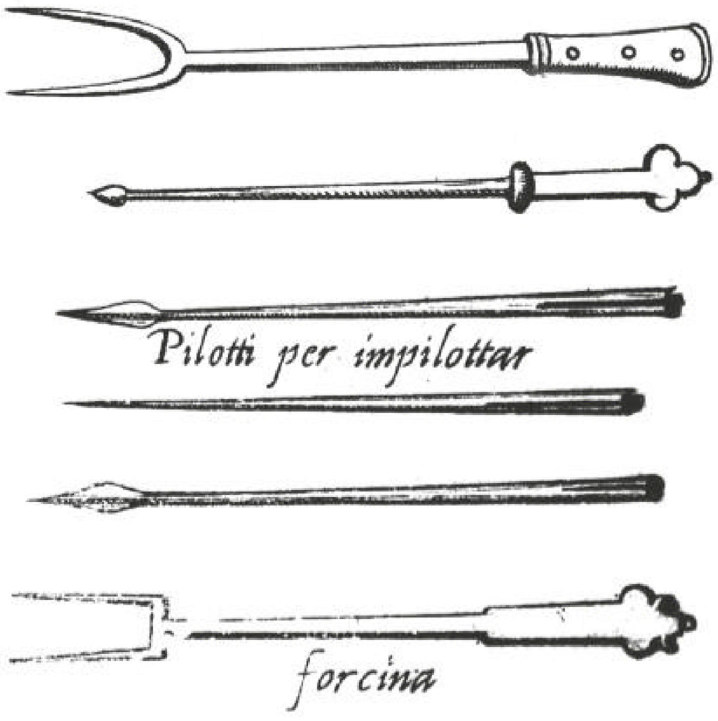
—Elisa Castel

The Fork: A New Way to Set the Table

Introduced to Europe from medieval Byzantium, the fork was initially scorned as unnatural and pretentious. Only by the 1800s was its conquest of the dining room complete.

For late 19th-century North Americans and Europeans, a fork—and the ability to use it with ease—was a reflection of good taste. A display of such tableware could reveal much about someone's social status, as the wealthy took great care to procure different types of forks for everything from salad to pastry. A special fork was even invented with which to eat ice cream: a spork-like instrument in the form of a spoon with three or four tines.

The centrality of the fork in Victorian-era dining etiquette would, however, have surprised earlier generations. It was, in fact, a newcomer to the utensil drawer, having only won widespread use in Europe by the close of the 18th century, and in America as late as the mid-1800s. Until then, people of all classes had eaten with what seemed the only utensils necessary: a knife to cut and spear, and a spoon to scoop.

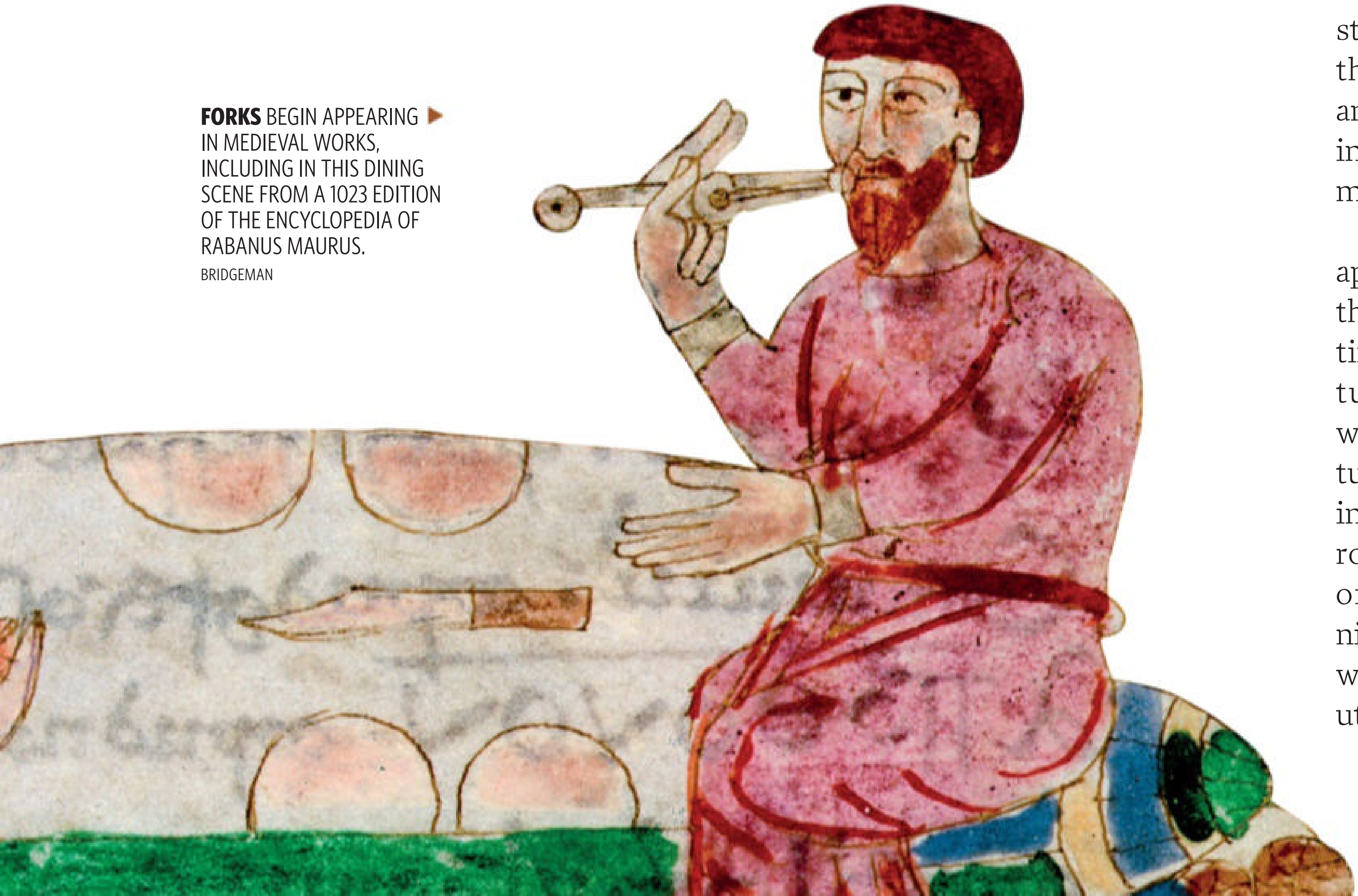


16TH-CENTURY FORKS FROM A GUIDEBOOK COMPILED BY THE COOK OF POPE PIUS V

INTERFOTO/ALAMY

ITALIAN TWO-TINE FORK, 15TH CENTURY. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

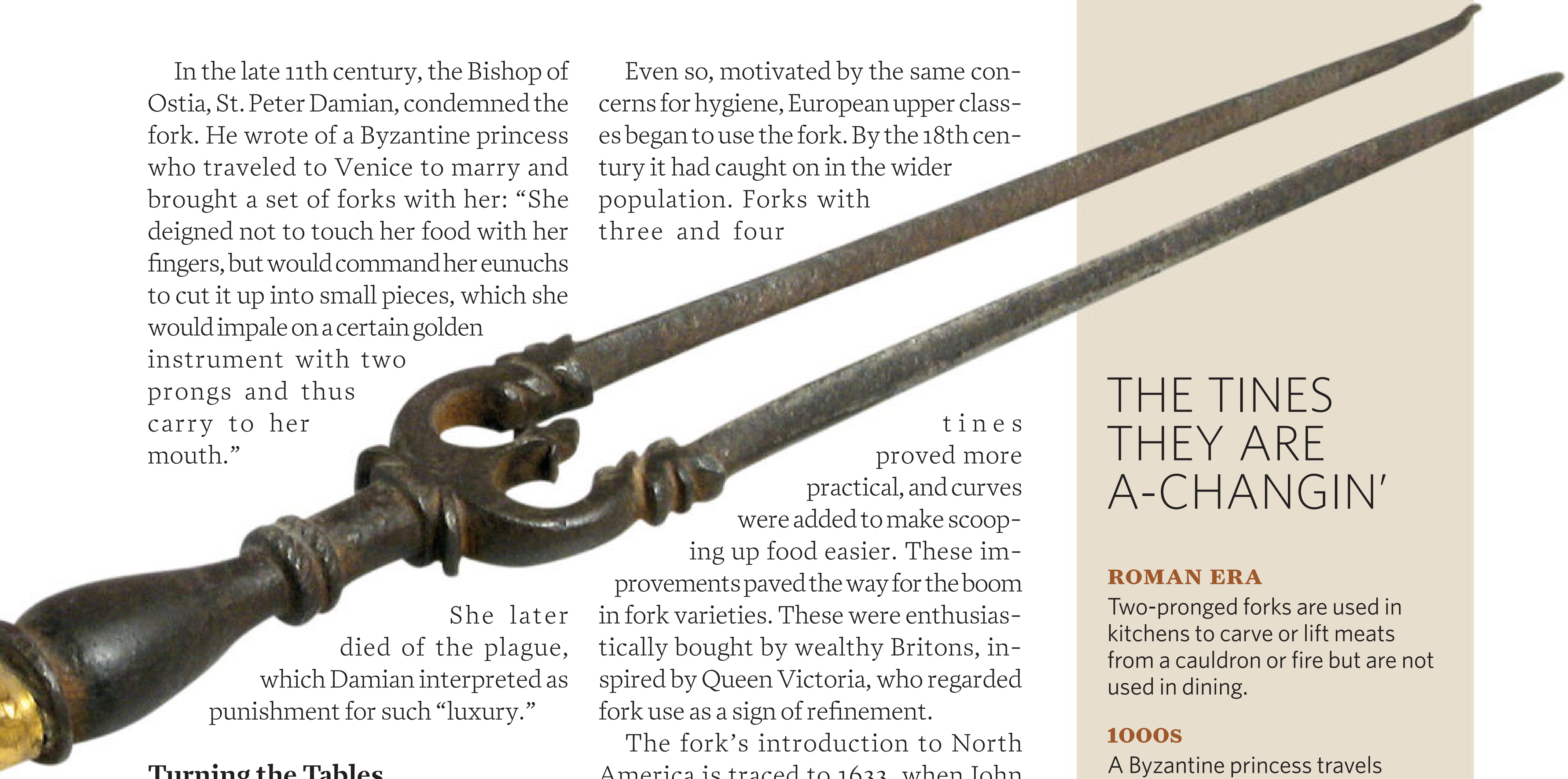


FORKS BEGIN APPEARING IN MEDIEVAL WORKS, INCLUDING IN THIS DINING SCENE FROM A 1023 EDITION OF THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RABANUS MAURUS.

BRIDGEMAN

Although the fork's path to the table was hard-won and slow, it probably started, in domestic terms at least, not all that far away—in the kitchen itself. In ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, cooking forks were used for carving or lifting meats from a cauldron or fire.

Following a reduction in size, the fork appears to have entered dining areas in the courts of the Middle East and Byzantine Empire by the eighth and ninth centuries, and become common among wealthy families there by the tenth century. Early in the 11th century, it crops up in graphic form in various pieces of European art, most notably a 1023 edition of a medieval encyclopedia by the ninth-century scholar Rabanus Maurus, which depicts a man eating with the new utensil.



In the late 11th century, the Bishop of Ostia, St. Peter Damian, condemned the fork. He wrote of a Byzantine princess who traveled to Venice to marry and brought a set of forks with her: “She deigned not to touch her food with her fingers, but would command her eunuchs to cut it up into small pieces, which she would impale on a certain golden instrument with two prongs and thus carry to her mouth.” She later died of the plague, which Damian interpreted as punishment for such “luxury.”

Turning the Tables

Despite such disapproval, the fork’s slow conquest of Europe was carried out from Italy. By the 1400s Florence’s ruling Medici family had 56 silver forks in their kitchen. Traveling to France to marry Henry II in 1533, Catherine de Médicis became the emissary of the fork in the royal court. She ran into immediate resistance. It was scorned as an affectation and provoked hilarity when food fell off.

English travel writer Thomas Coryate was very impressed with the utensil during a visit to Italy. Writing in his 1611 travel account, *Coryate’s Crudities,* he said: “[T]he Italian cannot by any means indure to have his dish touched with fingers, seeing all mens fingers are not alike cleane. Hereupon I my self thought good to imitate the Italian fashion.” He was mocked for doing so. The 18th-century author Johann Beckmann noted the English lampooned the utensil as “an effeminate piece of finery.”

Even so, motivated by the same concerns for hygiene, European upper classes began to use the fork. By the 18th century it had caught on in the wider population. Forks with three and four tines proved more practical, and curves were added to make scooping up food easier. These improvements paved the way for the boom in fork varieties. These were enthusiastically bought by wealthy Britons, inspired by Queen Victoria, who regarded fork use as a sign of refinement.

The fork’s introduction to North America is traced to 1633, when John Winthrop, a founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was gifted a dining set. It included “a forke for the useful application of which I leave to your discretion,” an admission that its function was not clear to the giver. At first, fork use in America was confined to the wealthy, and its spread through the wider population was slower than in Europe. By the mid-19th century the utensil had been adopted by the masses in the United States.

The industrial revolution cemented the fork’s presence on dining room tables as production of flatware became faster and less expensive. Writing in 1896 in *Social Etiquette,* Maud C. Cooke declared the fork had finally “subjugated the knife” in America, and “any attempt to give the knife undue prominence at [the] table is looked upon as a glaring offense against good taste.”

—Corrado Occhipinti Confalonieri

THE TINES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’

ROMAN ERA
Two-pronged forks are used in kitchens to carve or lift meats from a cauldron or fire but are not used in dining.

1000s
A Byzantine princess travels to Venice to wed and brings her own set of forks, which causes a scandal.

1533
After Italians embrace the fork, Catherine de Médicis tries (and fails) to promote it in France after marrying future King Henry II.

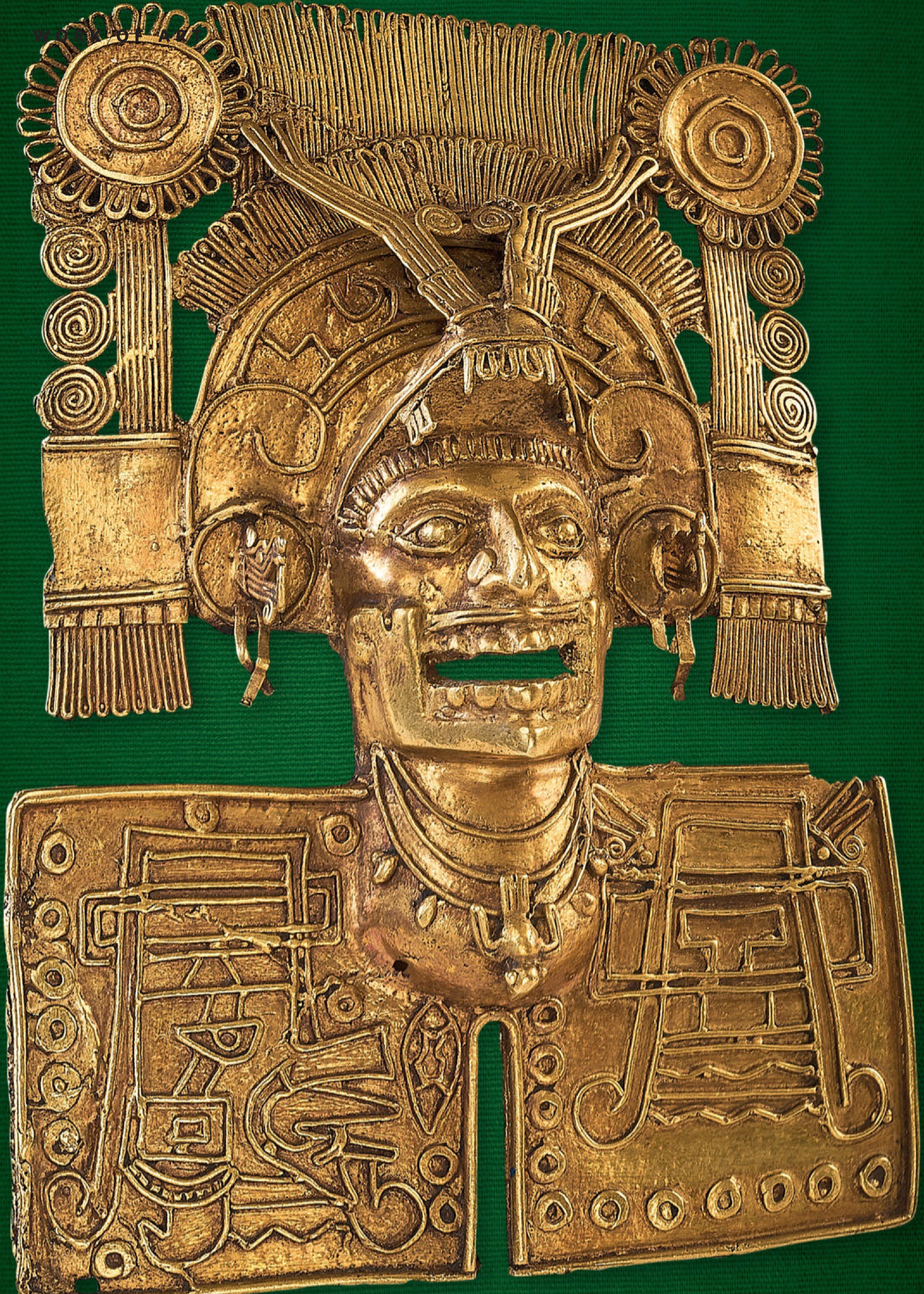
1611
English travel writer Thomas Coryate adopts the fork after a visit to Italy, but back home the practice is seen as pretentious.

1633
John Winthrop of Massachusetts becomes one of the first American colonists to use a fork, then largely confined to the wealthy.

1850
Inspired by Queen Victoria, who regards using forks as more refined, the utensil becomes popular with the English.

▼ **THREE-TINE FORK,** 17TH CENTURY. PALACE OF FINE ARTS, LILLE, FRANCE

STÉPHANE MARECHALLE/RMN-GRAND PALAIS



OLIVER SANTANA/RAÍCES

MONTE ALBÁN PECTORAL

Mixtec Masterpiece

A stunning pectoral, worn around the neck by a Mixtec dignitary, was one of more than 120 gold pieces found in a tomb in southern Mexico's ancient city of Monte Albán. The figure's complexity has led to several different symbolic interpretations.

The rich pre-Columbian past of Mexico's state of Oaxaca was largely hidden until archaeologist Alfonso Caso began his work there in 1930. Focusing on the ancient mountaintop city of Monte Albán, Caso determined that the site had served as the capital of the Zapotec empire for more than 1,000 years, but by the year 700 it had fallen into decline.

The Zapotec abandoned the city, and their successors, the Mixtec, came to power by 900. They would rule until 1521, after which date the Spanish extended their conquest of the region.

During their occupation, the Mixtec reused Monte Albán's Zapotec structures, including royal tombs. Caso uncovered 20 buildings and 176 tombs at the site. In 1932, after tunneling through a wall of an elite residence, he discovered Tomb 7, considered by many to be the most spectacular find ever made in Mesoamerica.

The tomb dates to about 1330. It contained more than 500 objects, including more than 120 gold ornaments, whose craftsmanship revealed the Mixtec as the most skilled goldsmiths of central and southern Mexico. They excelled in "lost-wax" casting, producing ornamental objects such as pectorals (chest ornaments hung from the neck), pendants, necklaces, and other items.

One of his most stunning finds was a formidable golden pectoral (opposite), which Caso described as "[p]erhaps the most beautiful Mexican gold figure we know of." Dazzling to behold, the pectoral also contains important information about Mixtec culture and the complex symbolic language in their art.

Questions of Identity

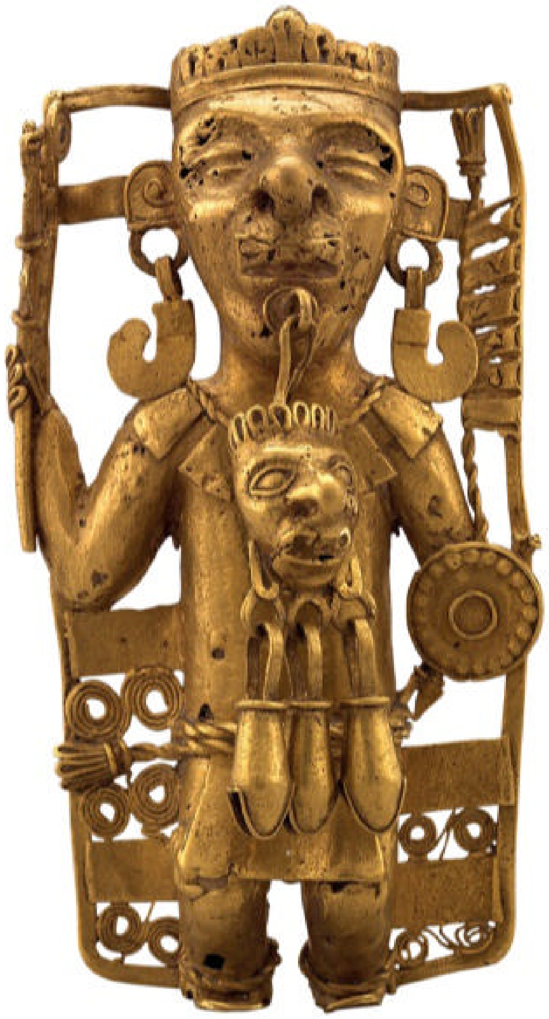
The Mixtec codices, another major discovery of Caso's from Monte Albán, have provided important context for the pectoral and for determining whom it might depict. Written on deerskin, the codices narrate the Mixtec origin myths and complicated genealogy of their rulers, priests, and warriors. Along with the Maya dynastic record, they provide the only known documentary history of the pre-Columbian New World.

Caso's studies of the Mixtec calendar systems allowed him to interpret the artwork on the pectoral's shoulders. He concluded that each piece corresponded to different calendars, that could be cross-referenced with calendar reform in the codices. Using this information, Caso believed the pectoral to depict a ruler known as Lord 5 Lizard. (A person's name and number is set by their date of birth in the Mixtec calendar.)

Some scholars such as Geoffrey McCafferty, professor emeritus of archaeology at the University of Calgary, have different interpretations. He believes the pectoral depicts Lady 3 Flint because the serpent headdress is the same one she wears in one of the codices, which leads him to think the pectoral was worn by her descendant known as Lady 4 Rabbit, who "would have worn it as an heirloom to legitimize her ancestry."

Today the pectoral and other treasures from Tomb 7 of Monte Albán are housed at the Museum of Cultures of Oaxaca, in Santo Domingo, Mexico.

—*Braden Phillips*



A MIXTEC WARRIOR-RULER figurine (right) dates to between the 12th and 14th centuries. It was discovered in Tehuantepec in 1870 during the excavation of a private residence. The object, made using the lost-wax technique, signals the owner's noble rank. Along with a shield and a serpent-headed implement, he has a pectoral, in the form of a severed head with three bells, hanging from his lip plug. British Museum, London

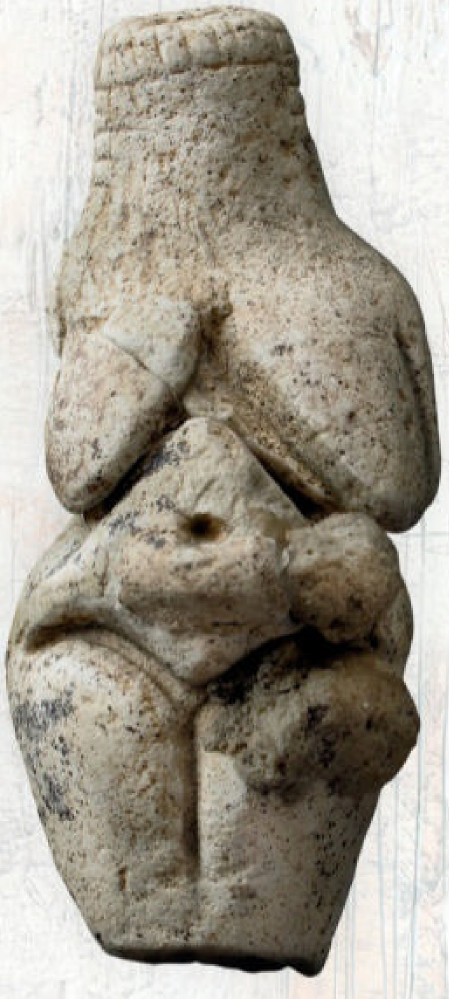
RMN-GRAND PALAIS

ICONS

OF THE STONE AGE

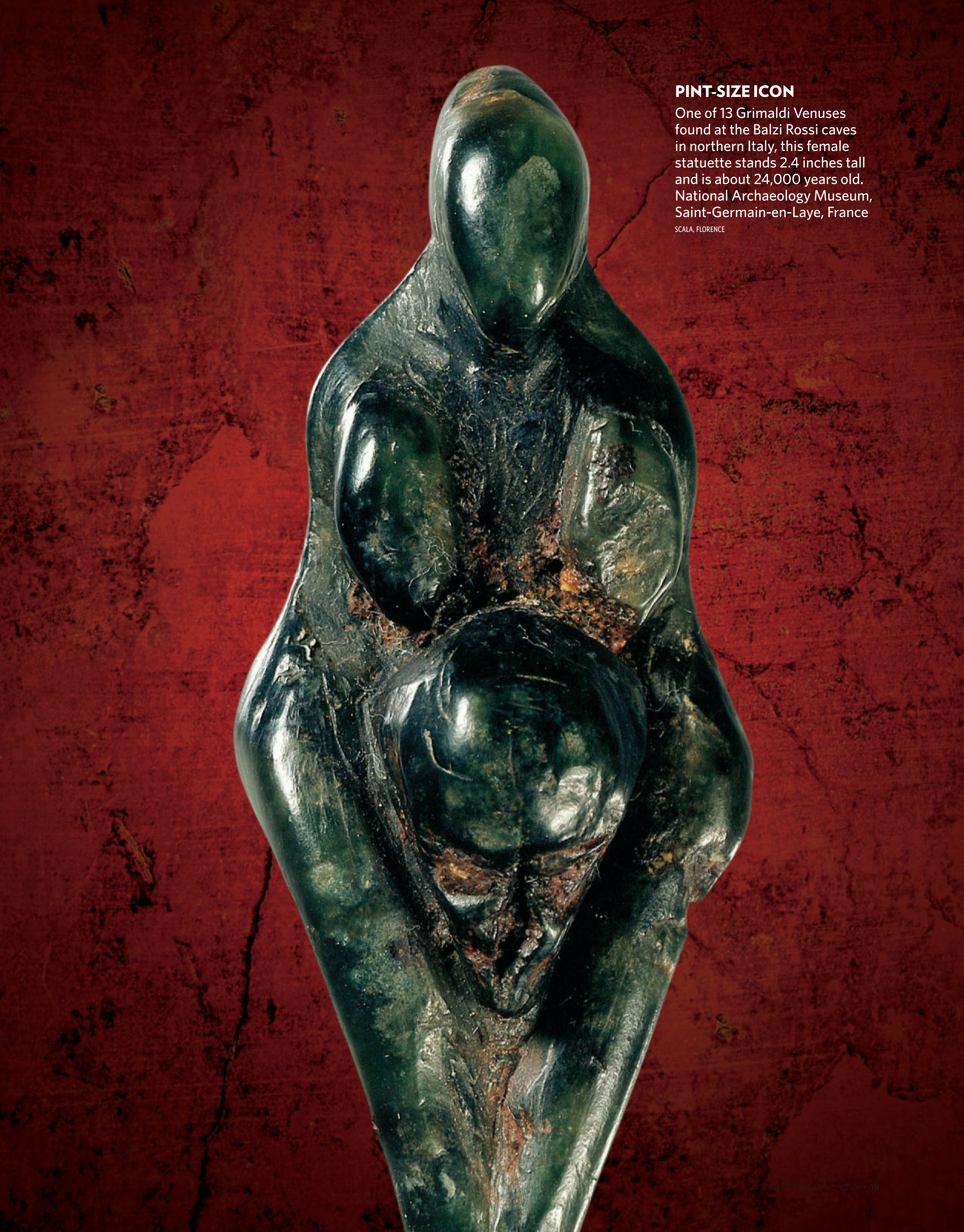
Made from stone, bone, and ivory, more than 200 Paleolithic figurines of female figures have intrigued and mystified scholars for more than a century. Theories abound as to their true purpose, but hard answers are elusive.

EDITORS OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



The Renancourt Venus was found in Amiens, France, in 2019. Carved from chalk in the late Gravettian period, she is 23,000 years old and 1.5 inches tall.

STÉPHANE LANCELOT, INRAP



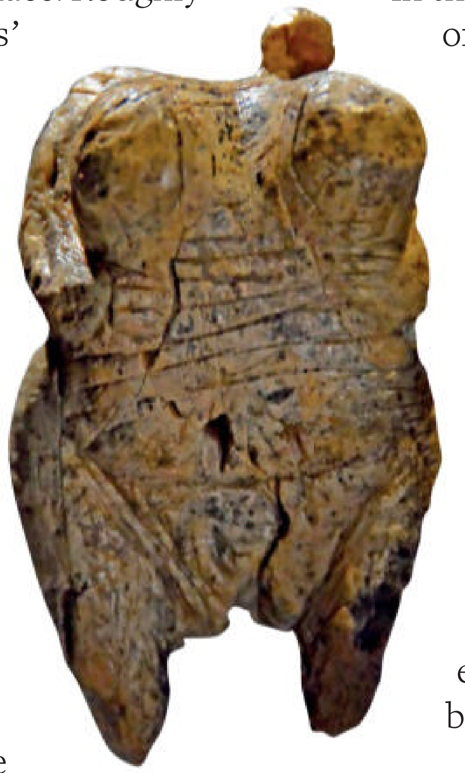
PINT-SIZE ICON

One of 13 Grimaldi Venuses found at the Balzi Rossi caves in northern Italy, this female statuette stands 2.4 inches tall and is about 24,000 years old. National Archaeology Museum, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

SCALA, FLORENCE

For about as long as people have been making art, female forms have been artists' favorite subjects—from the iconic Venus de Milo, sculpted in second-century B.C. Greece, to John Singer Sargent's 1884 elegant "Madame X." The anonymous artists of the Stone Age were no different; small statues of women were among their most popular works of art.

Found across Europe and Asia, these female figurines created during the Paleolithic period may seem crude by comparison when gazing at the brushstrokes of Madame X's flawless skin or Venus's beautifully sculpted face. Roughly rendered, the Stone Age figures' feminine traits—breasts, bellies, and hips—are large and exaggerated. Their lines are not streamlined and smooth, but rounded and swelling. Rather than sparkling eyes and smiling lips, their faces often lack distinctive features.



HOHLE FELS VENUS, IVORY, CA 35,000 YEARS OLD. MUSEUM OF PREHISTORY, BLAUBEUREN, GERMANY

DUKAS PRESSEAGENTUR GMBH/ALAMY

Collectively referred to as the Venus figurines, these statues are at the beginning of a long tradition of depicting the female form in art. They help connect modern viewers to the very distant past and the worlds of their creators some 35,000 to 14,000 years ago.

Shapes and Sizes

Human beings became artists about 80,000 years ago, but their first subjects were not people. Some of the earliest examples appear like abstract geometric patterns. As humanity progressed to more realistic depictions of the world around them, among their most popular subjects were animals like the horses and aurochs from the Chauvet Cave in southeastern France.

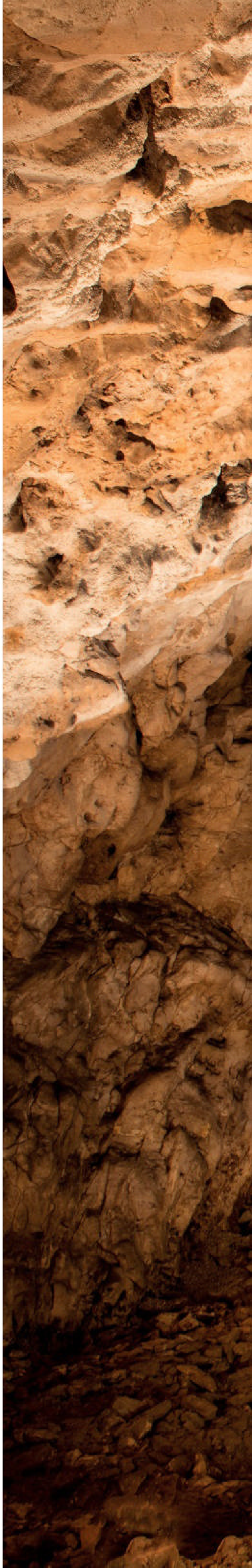
WHETHER CARVED FROM STONE OR BONE OR FASHIONED FROM CLAY, THE "VENUSES" ARE ALL TINY.

Human forms begin to appear somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 years ago in the Paleolithic period. Few works of art depicting people have survived from this time to the modern age; among the ones that have, more of them are female forms than male. Roughly 200 of the works of art now called Venuses have been found distributed across western Europe (concentrated in the Pyrenean area and southwest France, as well as in Italy); central Europe (especially around the Rhine and Danube basins); and eastern Europe and Asia (in southern Russia and as far east as Siberia).

Whether carved from stone or bone or fashioned from clay, the most notable feature among these works of art is their size. They are all tiny, measuring between two and 10 inches high, which made them portable and easy for nomadic peoples to carry from place to place.

Many of the Venuses' faces lack well-defined brows, eyes, noses, and mouths; some are as smooth as an egg. When facial features are present, they tend to be generalized, which led scholars to believe they could be general female representations rather than portraits of specific women.

Another hallmark of these Stone Age figures is that many of them are nude, a trait that may



FOUND IN A CAVE

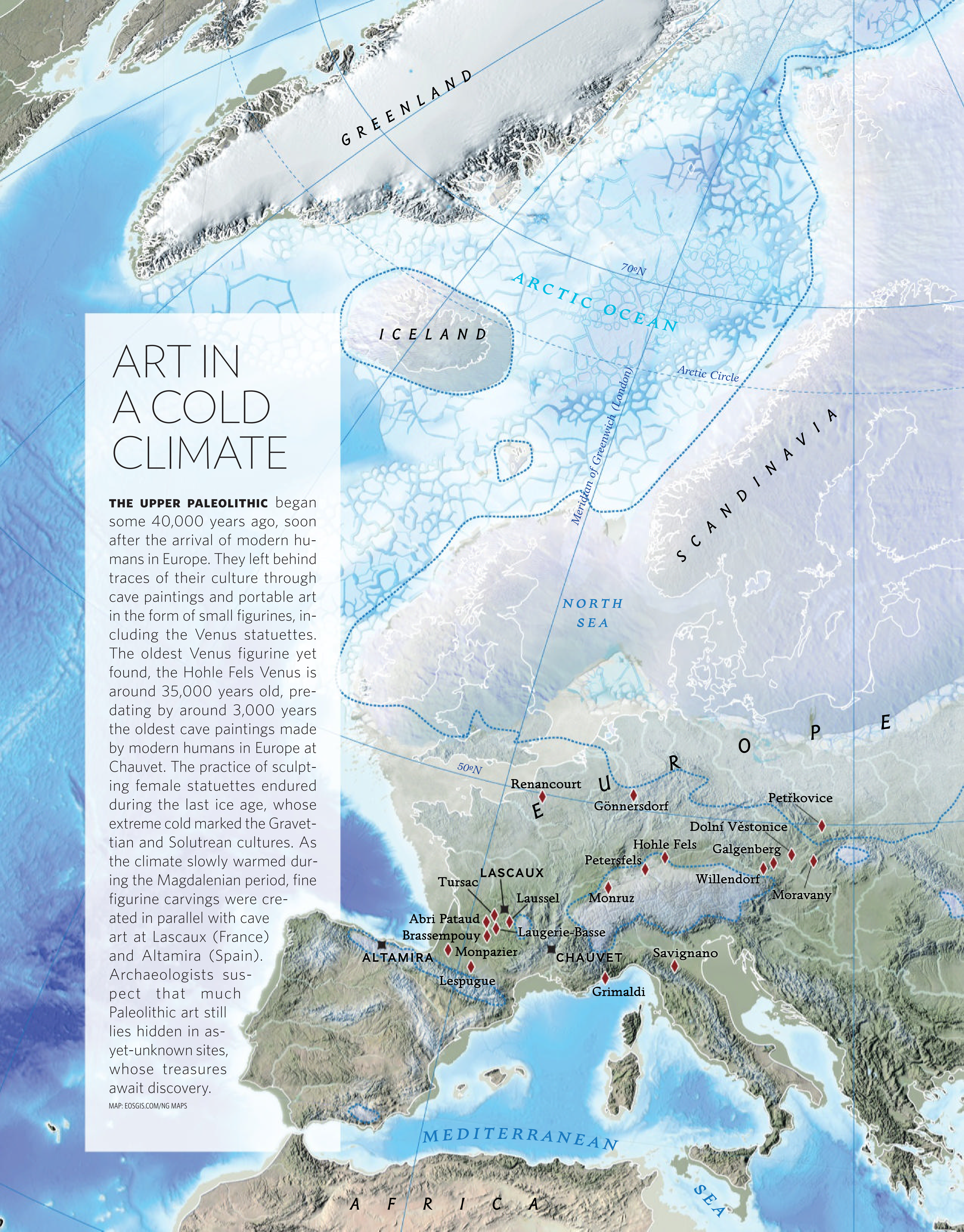
The oldest known Venus figurine (opposite), carved some 35,000 years ago, was found in the cave of Hohle Fels (pictured) in southern Germany.

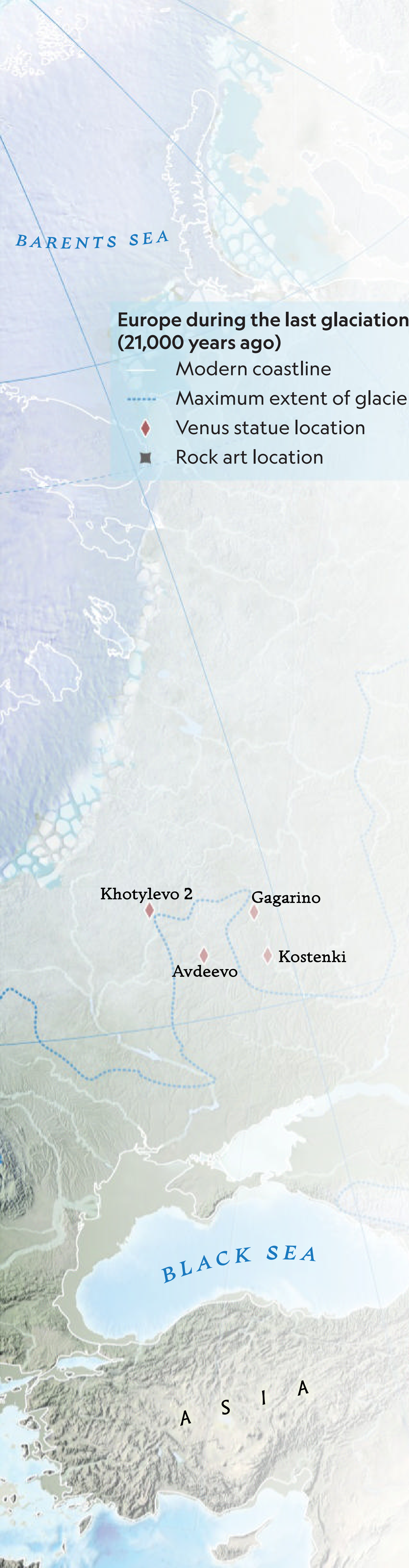
ALAMY/ACI

ART IN A COLD CLIMATE

THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC began some 40,000 years ago, soon after the arrival of modern humans in Europe. They left behind traces of their culture through cave paintings and portable art in the form of small figurines, including the Venus statuettes. The oldest Venus figurine yet found, the Hohle Fels Venus is around 35,000 years old, predating by around 3,000 years the oldest cave paintings made by modern humans in Europe at Chauvet. The practice of sculpting female statuettes endured during the last ice age, whose extreme cold marked the Gravettian and Solutrean cultures. As the climate slowly warmed during the Magdalenian period, fine figurine carvings were created in parallel with cave art at Lascaux (France) and Altamira (Spain). Archaeologists suspect that much Paleolithic art still lies hidden in as-yet-unknown sites, whose treasures await discovery.

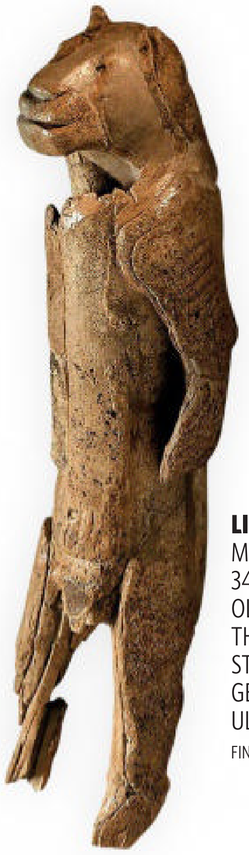
MAP: EOSGIS.COM/NG MAPS


GREENLAND
ICELAND
ARCTIC OCEAN
70ºN
Arctic Circle
Meridian of Greenwich (London)
SCANDINAVIA
NORTH SEA
EUROPE
50ºN
Renancourt
Gönnersdorf
Petřkovice
Dolní Věstonice
Hohle Fels
Galgenberg
Petersfels
LASCAUX
Tursac
Willendorf
Laussel
Monruz
Moravany
Abri Pataud
Brassempouy
Laugerie-Basse
ALTAMIRA
Monpazier
CHAUVET
Savignano
Lespugue
Grimaldi
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
AFRICA



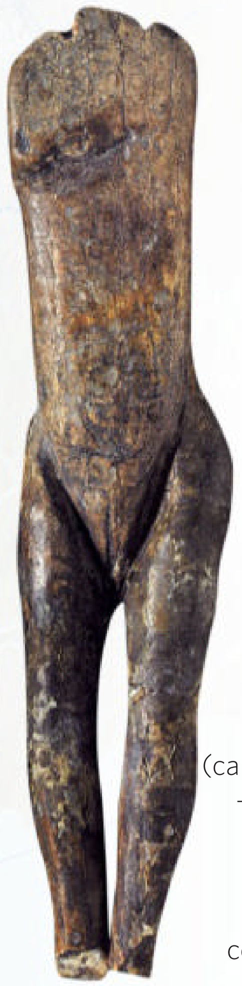
AURIGNACIAN CULTURE
(ca 43,000 to 26,000 years ago)

Homo sapiens settle in Europe, coexisting with *Homo neanderthalensis,* who will eventually die out. Mimicking Neanderthals, modern humans also make art on cave walls. They carve figurines of animals (Lion Man, right) and people, such as the Hohle Fels Venus and the Venus of Willendorf. The creation of female figurines during this period convinced archaeologists that modern humans were capable of producing complex art earlier than previously thought.



LION MAN
MAMMOTH IVORY, 34,000 YEARS OLD, FOUND IN THE HOHLENSTEIN-STADEL CAVE, GERMANY. MUSEUM ULM, GERMANY

FINE ART/AGE FOTOSTOCK



VENUS OF LAUGERIE-BASSE, IVORY, 17,000 TO 12,000 YEARS OLD, FOUND IN DORDOGNE, FRANCE. MUSEUM OF MANKIND, PARIS

J.ANGULO/M. GARCÍA

GRAVETTIAN CULTURE
(ca 26,000 to 20,000 years ago)

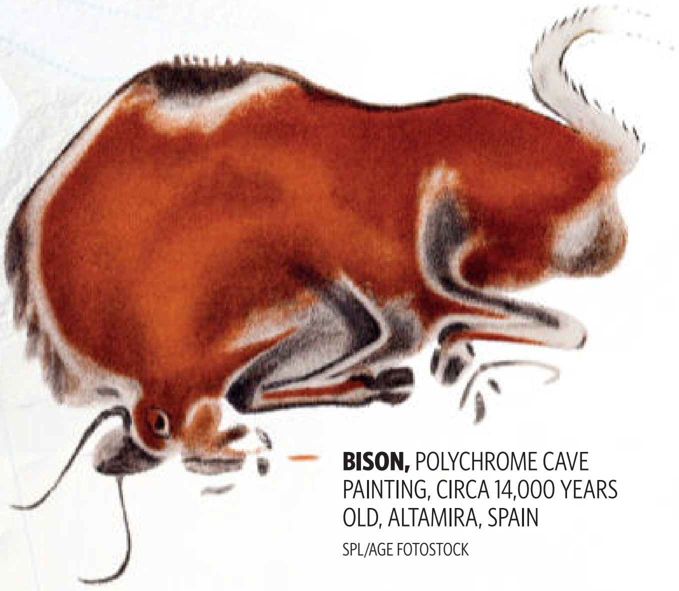
Centered on modern-day France and eastern Europe, the period of the Gravettian culture produces many Venus figurines. Those found to date include the Renancourt Venus (France); the Venus of Brassempouy (France); and the Grimaldi Venuses (Italy). The advance of the ice sheets probably contributed to a preference for portable Venuses, as communities were forced to migrate when cold temperatures intensified.

SOLUTREAN CULTURE
(ca 20,000 to 17,000 years ago)

This culture dawns during the Last Glacial Maximum, the last time in human history the ice sheets extended over central Europe. Human groups occupied temperate regions of southern Europe and southern Russia. The wall art and sculpture of this very cold period is noted for its emphasis on large herbivores, such as bison, a shift from earlier emphasis on wild predators, such as lions.

MAGDALENIAN CULTURE
(ca 17,000 to 10,000 years ago)

Magdalenian culture is marked by reindeer hunting on the European tundra south of the ice sheets. The beast makes its way into the cave paintings and portable sculptures of the period. Both portable and cave art are notable for the artists' precise execution, exemplified in the Venus of Laugerie-Basse (top, left). Cave paintings of animals emphasized color and movement, such as the bison from Altamira, Spain (left).



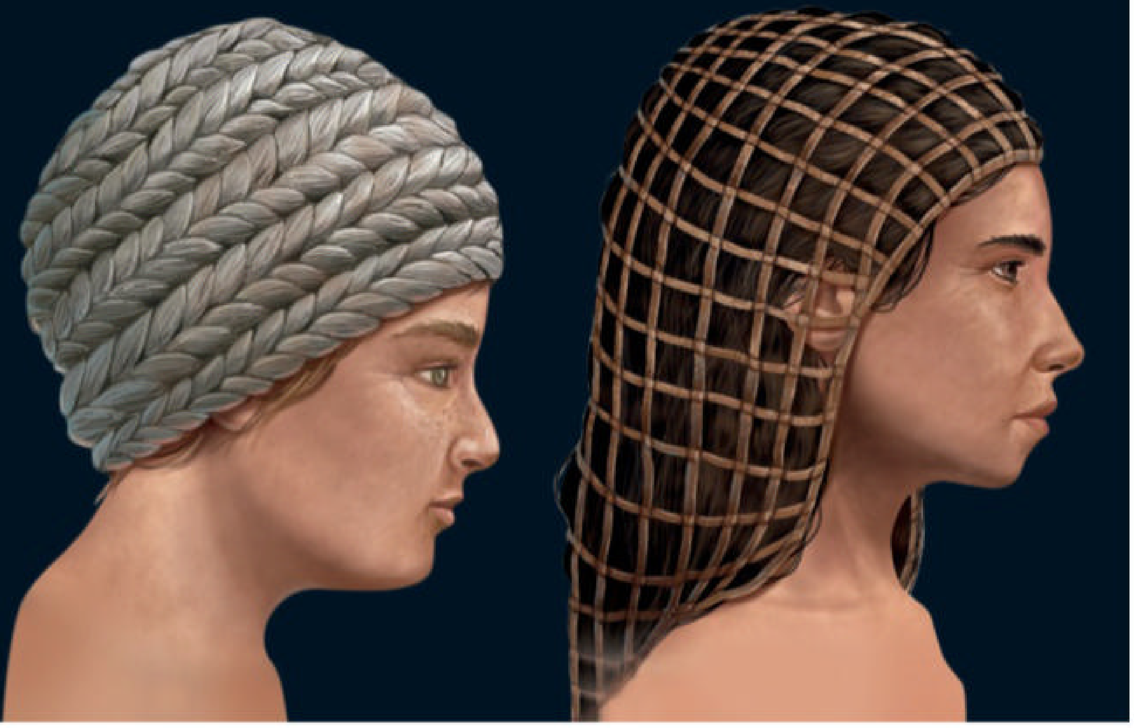
BISON, POLYCHROME CAVE PAINTING, CIRCA 14,000 YEARS OLD, ALTAMIRA, SPAIN

SPL/AGE FOTOSTOCK

Hats or Hair?

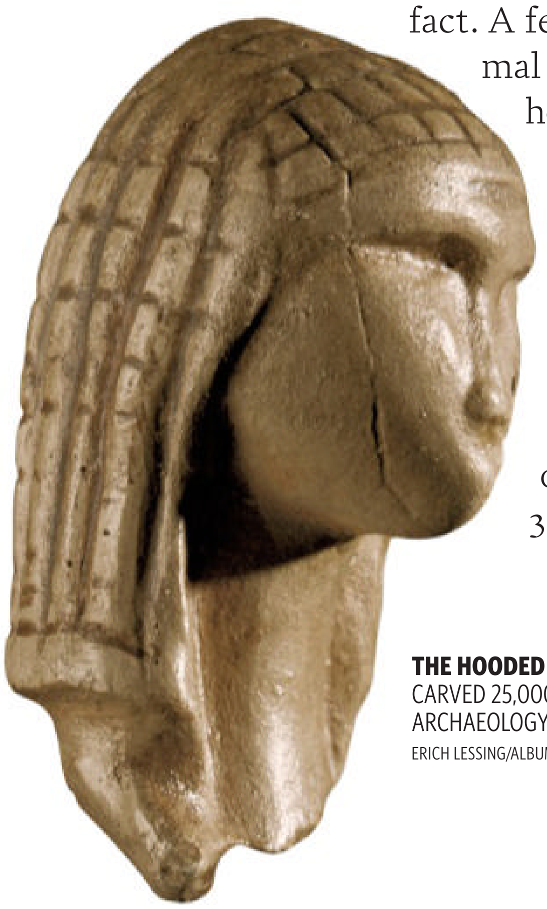
THE HEADS of the female figurines may not have the most interesting faces (if they have features at all), but their creators spent time and attention crafting what appeared on top. Some interpret these marks simply as hairstyles, while others see them as adornments, hairnets, and hats. The markings on the Venus of Willendorf (opposite) and the Venus of Brassempouy (below) have been interpreted as headdresses. Whatever the artists' intentions, the markings have helped modern scholars understand that during the Paleolithic period, humans were using ornamentation.

ILLUSTRATION: ALADEMOSCA.COM/C. MARTÍNEZ



have shocked the men who uncovered them in the 1800s. The figures do not appear demure or modest; their nudity is direct and matter of fact. A few of the figurines wear minimal adornments such as necklaces, hoods, hairnets, belts, or bracelets. Their bodies do reflect different physical types—some are slim and others curvy—while their breasts, hips, and bellies are rounded and prominent.

The oldest figure discovered (so far) comes from the German site of Hohle Fels and dates back about 35,000 years. It measures just 2.75 inches tall. The "youngest" figures found to date are about 14,000 years old. Such a wide time span demonstrates that these figures were important to prehistoric peoples for a very long period of time.



THE HOODED LADY, OR THE VENUS OF BRASSEMPOUY, CARVED 25,000 YEARS AGO (FRAGMENT). NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM, SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE, FRANCE

ERICH LESSING/ALBUM

Early Discoveries

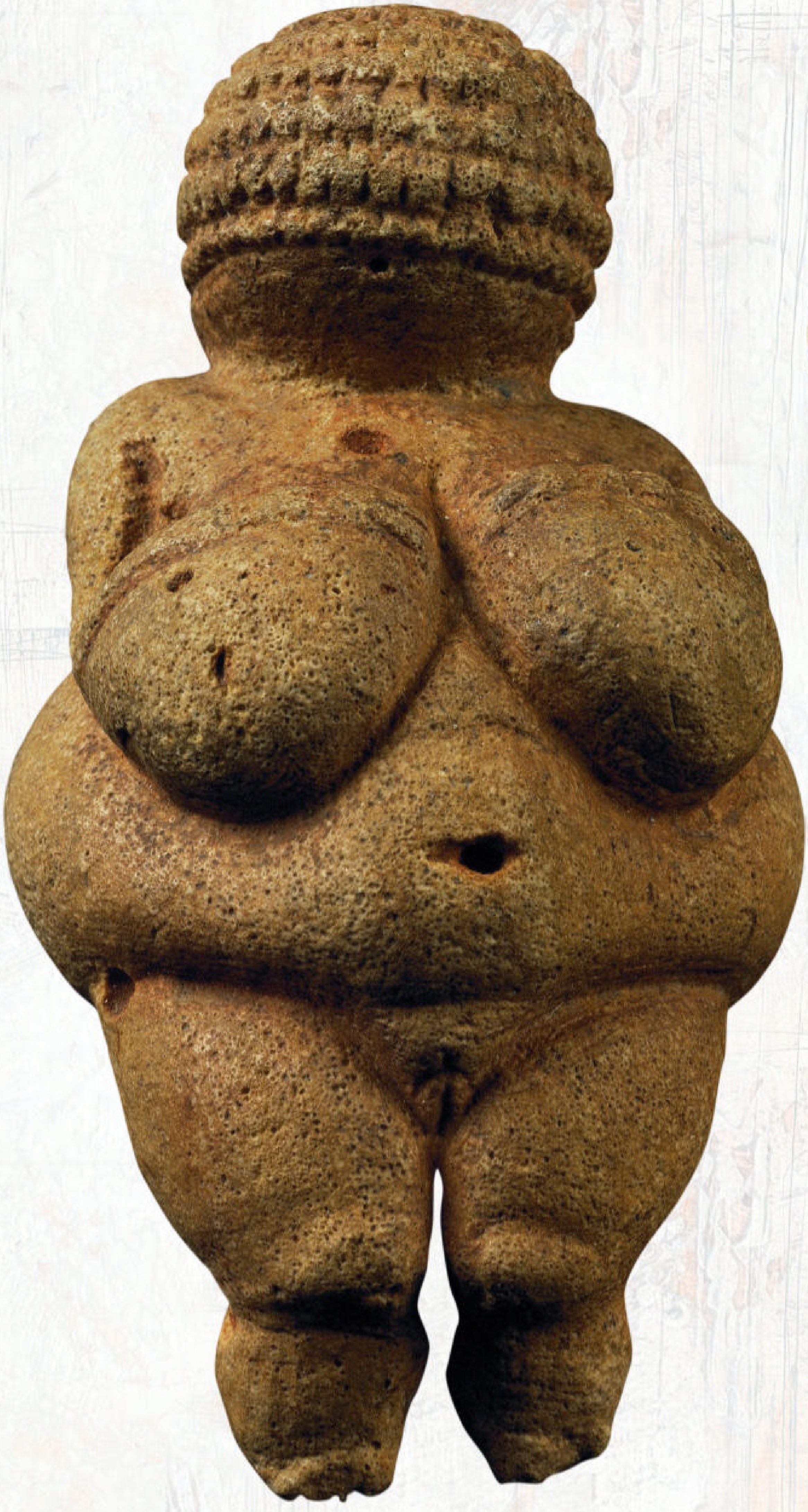
European scholars began recovering the so-called Venus figurines in the 19th century. The first one was found in 1864 by French archaeologist Paul Hurault, Marquis de Vibraye. He uncovered a three-inch-high ivory figurine at Laugerie-Basse, France. The carved nude figure is missing its head and arms, but the hips, pubic mound, and legs are well defined. Analysis shows that the figure dates to around 17,000 to 12,000 years ago.

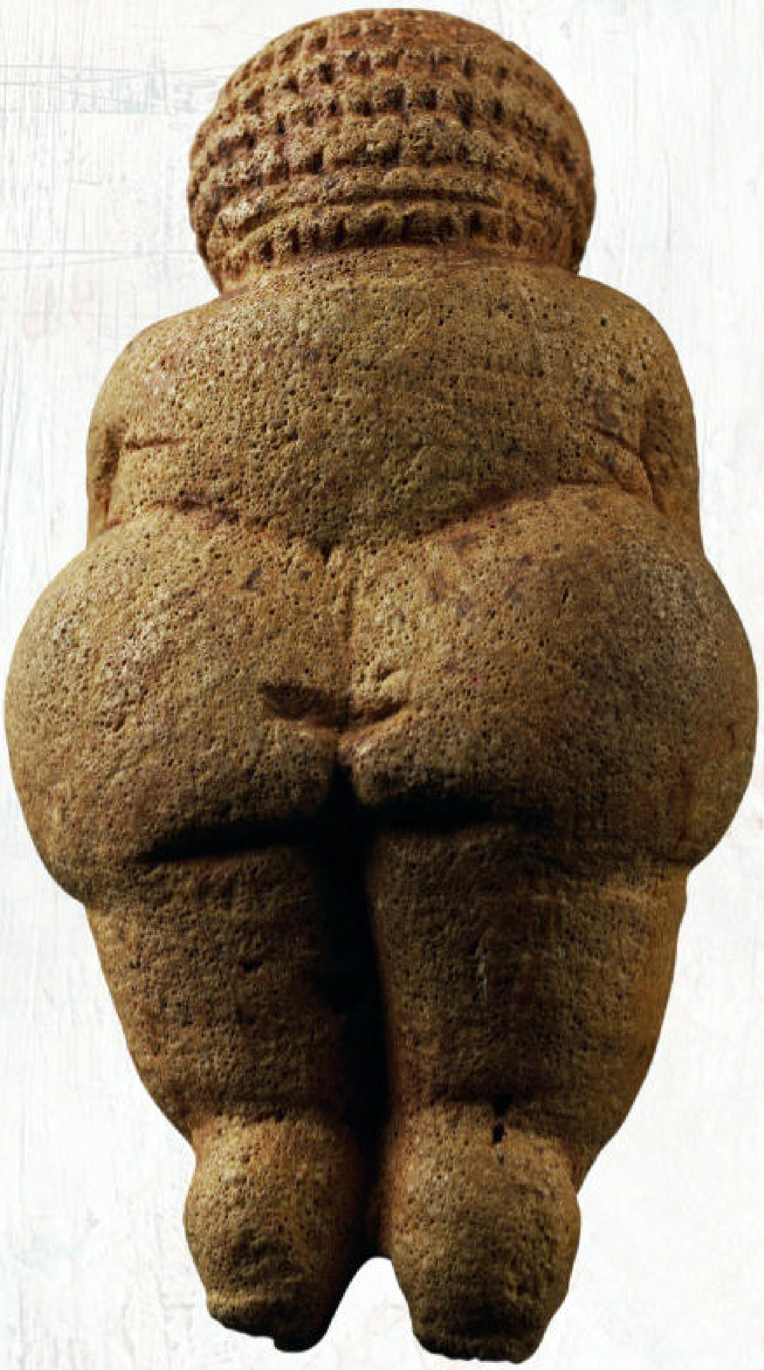
Hurault dubbed the small statue *Vénus impudique*, which means "immodest Venus," in a nod to European artworks that depict *Vénus pudica,* or "modest Venus." A famous example is Sandro Botticelli's the "Birth of Venus," in which the Roman goddess of love and beauty modestly shields the viewer from her nudity. The prehistoric female figure from Laugerie-Basse, and many others found since then, present rather than cover up their bodies. Hurault's naming convention caught on among other archaeologists of the time, and Paleolithic statues like these were soon grouped together as "Venuses" in the collective imagination.

The Venus of Brassempouy, discovered in 1894, is believed to be the world's oldest depiction of a human face. Sculpted in ivory roughly 25,000 years ago, her brows and nose have been carefully rendered in miniature. The figure is sometimes called the "hooded lady" because of the pattern of lines etched into her head. Some scholars interpret them as a hood with a decorative pattern, while others believe it simply represents hair.

The Brassempouy fragment is small, slightly more than an inch in length, and scholars believe it was once part of a larger figure carved from a mammoth's tusk. French archaeologist Édouard Piette discovered the sculpture in a cave in southwestern France. Exploring the cave in the 1890s, Piette's team also found fragments of other anthropomorphic works, some of which appeared female.

Perhaps the most iconic figure is the so-called Venus of Willendorf, discovered in the Danube





WOMAN OR GODDESS

NO TALLER THAN 4.5 INCHES, this tiny figure made a tremendous impact on art history when discovered in 1908. Dubbed the Venus of Willendorf, after where it was found in Austria, it is roughly 30,000 years old, fashioned during the Aurignacian culture of the Upper Paleolithic. Carved from limestone, the faceless sculpture bears traces of red ocher pigment. Her large breasts, round hips, and protruding belly led many scholars to believe the sculpture represented a fertility goddess, but a recent controversial theory suggests this Venus of Willendorf and others like it are self-portraits, carved from the perspective of a woman looking down at her own body—perhaps while she was pregnant. Whatever its ancient purpose, the Willendorf statue is an instantly recognizable icon of Stone Age art. It can be seen today at the Natural History Museum, Vienna, Austria.

PHOTOS: ERICH LESSING/ALBUM

Valley in Austria. Named after the place where it was found in 1908, the small limestone figure measures slightly more than four inches high. The artist carved several bands encircling the figure's head which may be hair or may depict a hat. The figure's body features large breasts, a protruding belly, rounded buttocks, and legs that taper to a point. The artist's visual emphasis led scholars in the 1900s to believe that the artwork must be a fertility goddess, who embodied love and beauty. Their conclusions came under scrutiny in the following decades, as debate arose over what evidence existed to support a claim that the Venus of Willendorf's subject shared a function similar to its Roman-era namesake.

RED CALF ETCHING. COW BONE AND IRON OXIDE, REPLICA OF A MAGDALENIAN-ERA ARTIFACT FOUND AT THE CAVE OF MAS-D'AZIL, FRANCE

SPL/AGE FOTOSTOCK

Explanations and Controversies

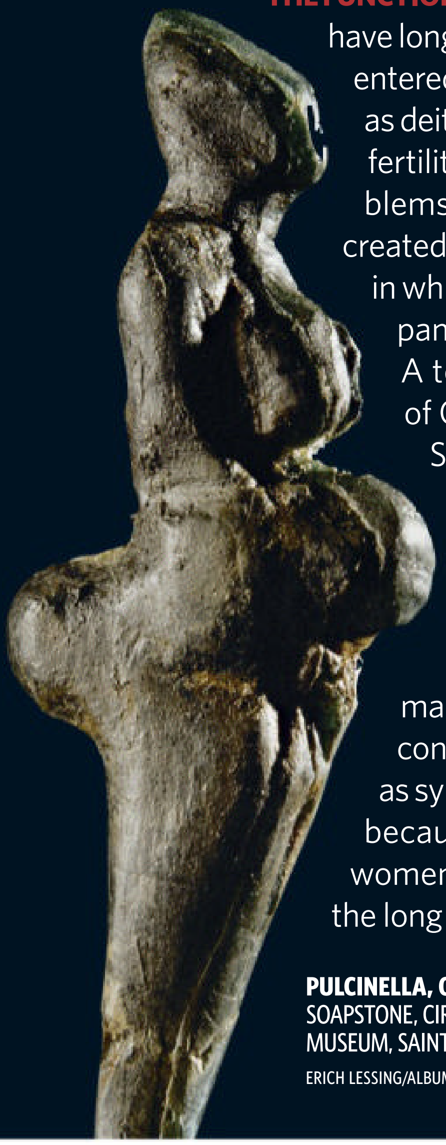
These statues may be small in stature, but the debate surrounding them is enormous. The function and meaning of the Venuses have been hotly debated ever since the first discovery in the 19th century. Since Stone Age humans left behind no written records, scholars have had to rely on the archaeological record to formulate different hypotheses. Because this kind of evidence may be more open to interpretation, consensus among scholars has been difficult to achieve. Even the term "Venus" has come under fire since it is an anachronism (Venus would not be worshipped until the Roman era) and because it may imply that the Stone Age figures fulfilled the same role as the Roman goddess. The name has stuck in the popular consciousness, but scholars debate its continued use.

One of the earliest and most common theories was that the small carved figures were goddesses of childbirth and reproduction. They served as divine representations and were used in fertility rituals. This theory puts forth the notion that the communities across Europe and Asia highly valued fecundity and motherhood enough to display them in their works of art.

Some researchers argue that because the figures are loosely naturalistic rather than realistic and based on a specific person, they must have been endowed with ceremonial or commemorative purposes. The female figurines perhaps served as a link between the worlds of the living and of the dead in this context. Others suggested that they were ritual items, believed to possess supernatural powers and used by shamans or healers.

Other hypotheses have moved away from religious or mystical considerations into the more mundane. Some researchers' explanations range far and wide—from erotic objects to children's toys. It is, of course, possible that the figures were made for different purposes in different places or periods, as the geographic areas and time spans in which they have been found are both vast. One controversial, recent theory is that some of the figures may be self-portraits, created from the perspective of a woman looking down at her own body. As research progresses and new discoveries are made, it is almost certain that ideas will continue to evolve on the roles of the figures.

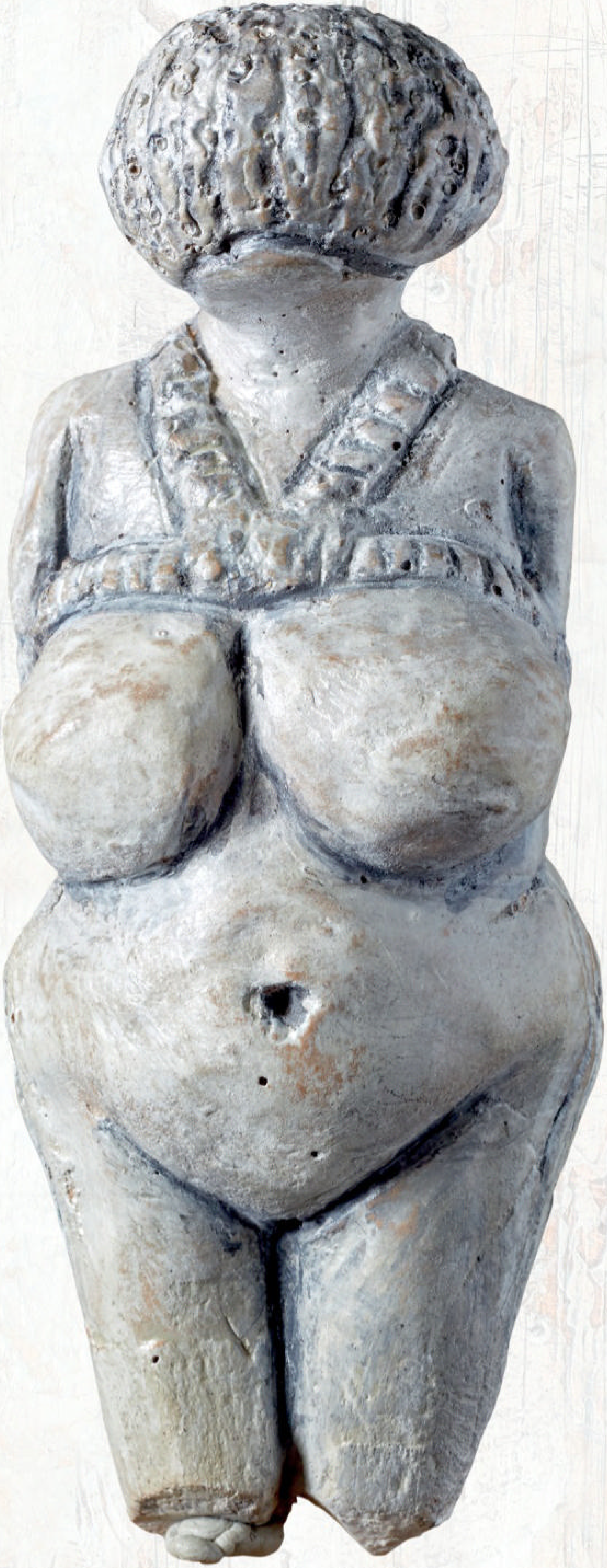
Surviving the Long Winters

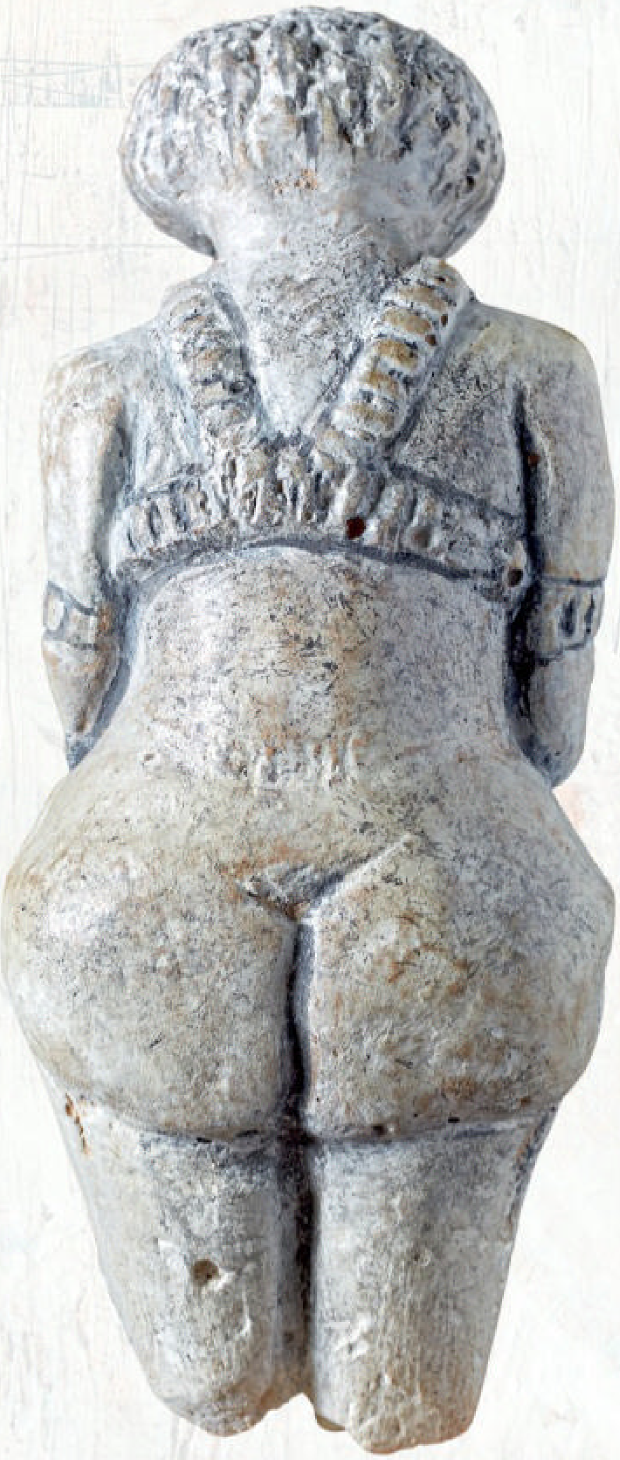


THE FUNCTION AND MEANING of the Stone Age Venuses have long been debated, and a new hypothesis has entered the fray. Rather than seeing the figurines as deities or embodying aspects of sexuality and fertility, researchers are looking at them as emblems of survival. Many of these figures were created during the Last Glacial Maximum, a time in which temperatures plummeted, glaciers expanded, and food resources became scarce. A team of researchers from the University of Colorado and the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, studied the Venus figurines and noted that more voluptuous artworks with prominent fat deposits on the hips, buttocks, and bellies were found closer to glaciers. The farther away a population lived from an ice mass, the more proportions decreased. They concluded that fuller-figured Venuses served as symbols of survival in harsh, frigid conditions because the bodies of these "overnourished" women could withstand food shortages during the long winter.

PULCINELLA, ONE OF THE 13 GRIMALDI VENUSES. SOAPSTONE, CIRCA 24,000 YEARS OLD. NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM, SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE, FRANCE

ERICH LESSING/ALBUM





STONE AGE FASHIONS

THIS LIMESTONE FIGURINE WAS DISCOVERED IN 1983 at the Russian site of Kostenki near the River Don. Like the other Venuses, it is small measuring four inches high. Scholars believe it was made between 23,000 and 21,000 years ago, during the period of the Gravettian culture. In terms of shape and the detail of the hairstyle or headdress, it resembles the Venus of Willendorf. Both figures were painted with red ocher. The figure wears various ornaments: bands or belts on the upper body and bracelets on the forearms and wrists. Such ornaments may have been made from leather, animal skins, or vegetable fibers. Various lines are visible on the buttocks and hips that could represent clothing (braids of threads, strings, or strips of leather). Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

PHOTOS: ERICH LESSING/ALBUM

Women’s Hands

OUTLINES OF HUMAN HANDS are one kind of Paleolithic cave art that strongly connects modern viewers to their Stone Age ancestors. Until very recently, many scholars believed that men created these works, but a recent study has determined that many were made by women. Archaeologist Dean Snow of Pennsylvania State University analyzed handprint art from eight caves in southern France and northern Spain, compared the results to a reference population of people with similar ancestry to the Stone Age artists, and found that many of these ancient artists were female.

REACHING OUT Stencils of human hands were found in a cave at Pech-Merle in southern France (above). New research indicates that women made these by using a blowpipe to spray pigment around a person’s hand to create an outline.

AKG/ALBUM

Practical Considerations

The figures’ abundant curves, large breasts, and swollen bellies have led many researchers analyzing this prehistoric art to link it to reproduction. Studies into the birth rate and demographics of today’s hunter-gatherer societies suggest that a woman who reaches 40 years of age in optimal health is likely to have had an average of six to seven children. In the Paleolithic, however, infant and child mortality rates were much higher. Exact figures are difficult to calculate, but some studies estimate that roughly 28 percent of children died in the first year of life. In addition to high infant mortality, the fatalities of women who died in childbirth or shortly after—also difficult to calculate exactly—are equally estimated to have been quite high. Maintaining populations, given these demographic trends, would be difficult.

Scholars studying the Venus figurines look to these harsh realities when forming their hypotheses about the motivations behind creating the figures. They see the robust, rounded figures as a representation of healthy mothers whose physical abundance provided the greatest possibilities for perpetuation of the group. Stone Age peoples may have believed that a well-nourished woman was more likely to produce a well-nourished newborn and to survive the rigors of pregnancy and childbirth.

Some figures, however, do not fit neatly into these assumptions. Figures found in Russia and Siberia are markedly different. They were more recently produced, dating to approximately 17,000 years ago. Although the figures are nude and lack defined facial features like specimens found in western Europe, the bodies of these eastern works are slim with less prominent sexual characteristics. Some scholars believe the groups living in these regions might have been more stable with fewer anxieties surrounding maintaining the population.

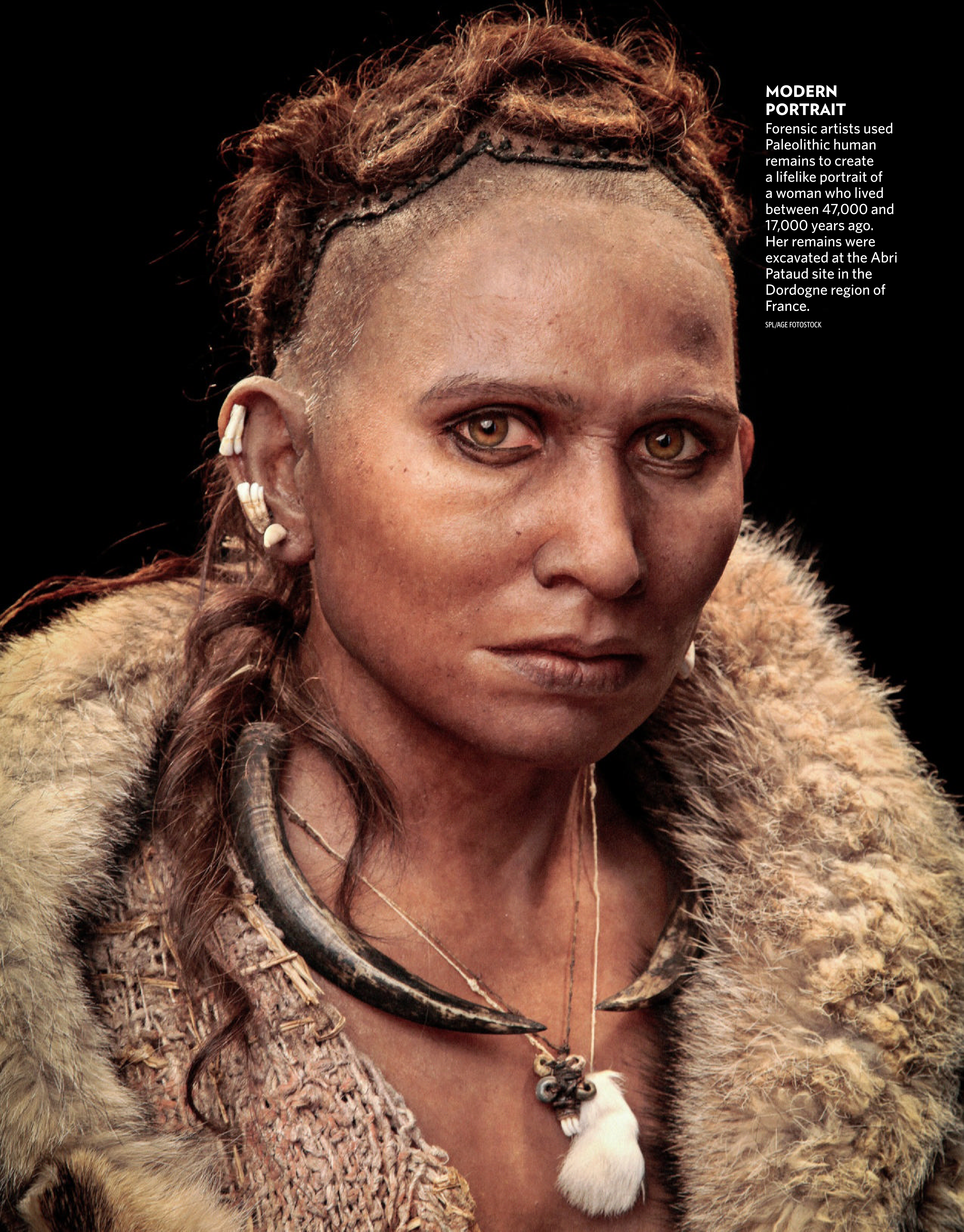
The large number of female figurines and the predominance of female representations over male ones during the Paleolithic highlights the social importance of women in the hunter-gatherer societies of that time. It is remarkable to consider that these female figures, sharing many stylistic traits, were being carved across a broad geographic range of Paleolithic communities—from southern France all the way to Siberia—for at least 20,000 years. The symbolism transcended a particular time and place and was kept alive across all kinds of natural terrain and environments. The archaeological evidence suggests a deep-rooted common ideology in the Paleolithic period about the value of women. ■

THESE FIGURES WERE BEING CARVED ACROSS PALEOLITHIC COMMUNITIES—FROM SOUTHERN FRANCE TO SIBERIA—FOR AT LEAST 20,000 YEARS.

Learn more

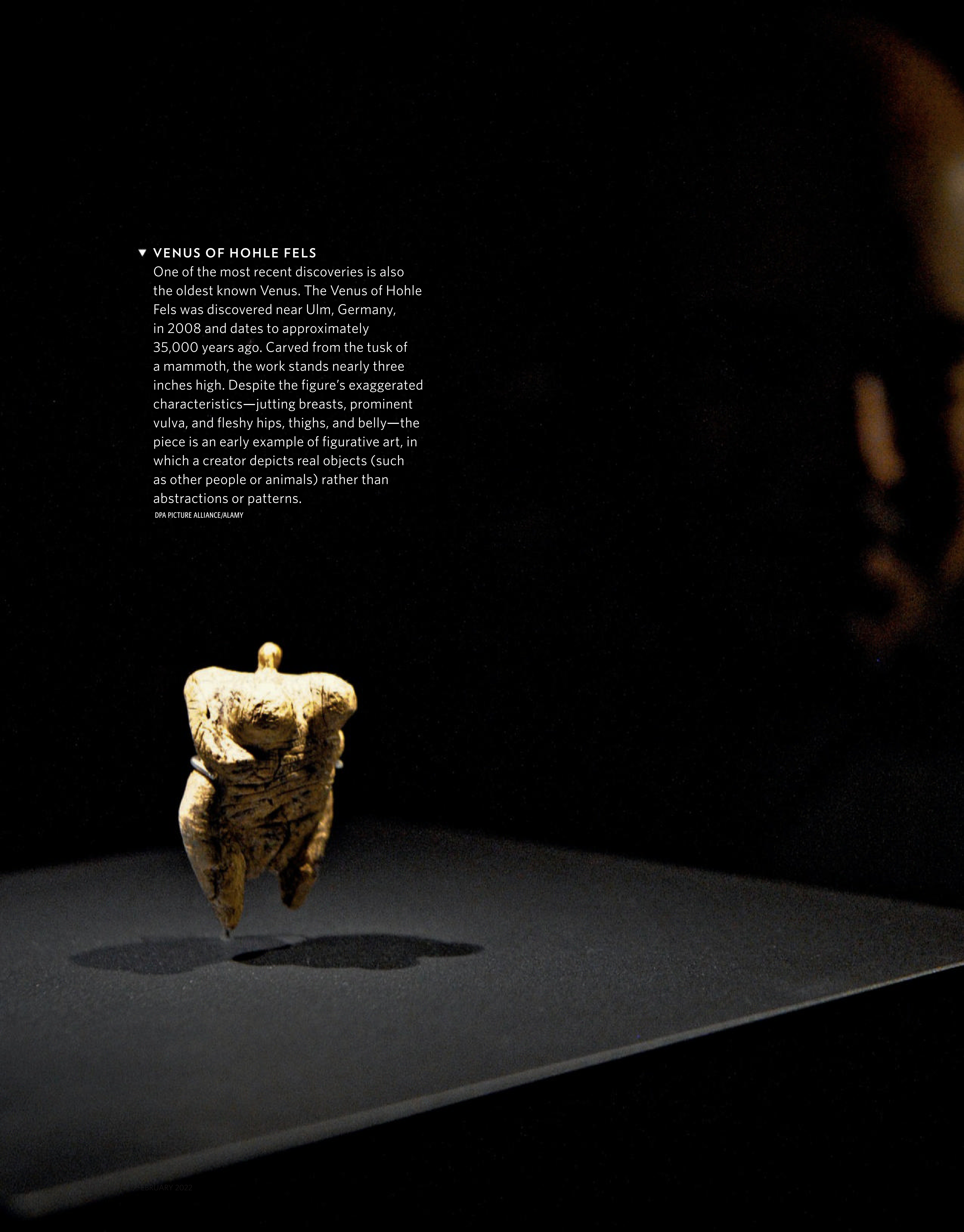
Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind
Jill Cook, British Museum Press, 2013.

Prehistoric Art: The Symbolic Journey of Humankind
Randall White, Harry N. Abrams. 2003.



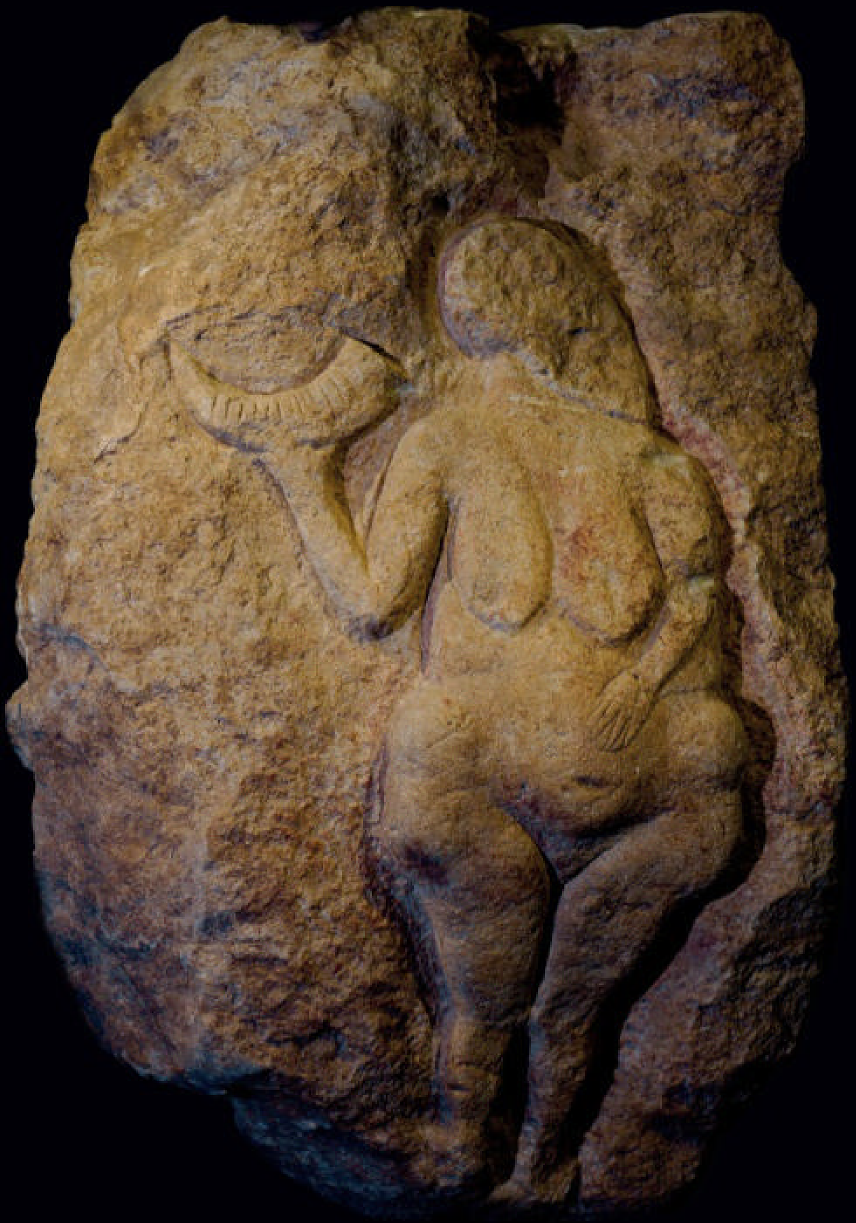
MODERN PORTRAIT
Forensic artists used Paleolithic human remains to create a lifelike portrait of a woman who lived between 47,000 and 17,000 years ago. Her remains were excavated at the Abri Pataud site in the Dordogne region of France.

SPL/AGE FOTOSTOCK



▼ **VENUS OF HOHLE FELS**
One of the most recent discoveries is also the oldest known Venus. The Venus of Hohle Fels was discovered near Ulm, Germany, in 2008 and dates to approximately 35,000 years ago. Carved from the tusk of a mammoth, the work stands nearly three inches high. Despite the figure's exaggerated characteristics—jutting breasts, prominent vulva, and fleshy hips, thighs, and belly—the piece is an early example of figurative art, in which a creator depicts real objects (such as other people or animals) rather than abstractions or patterns.

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY



LAUSSEL VENUS ▶
A contemporary of the Venus figurines is a stone relief found in 1911 at the French site of Laussel. Archaeologists uncovered the so-called Lady With the Horn, which dates back 25,000 years. Unlike the statuettes, the female figure holds in her hand an animal horn that is etched with 13 lines. Both the horn and the lines have inspired different theories about their meanings. Some researchers interpret the horn as representing masculinity, while others suggest that it represents the horn of plenty, connecting it to both fertility and abundance. The 13 etched lines have been linked to the 13 full moons of a full calendar year, perhaps suggesting a link with menstrual cycles.

ASF/ALBUM

CONNECTION TO THE PAST

GODDESSES OF SEX AND MOTHERHOOD were an important part of many ancient pantheons: Nut and Isis in ancient Egypt; Ninhursag and Ishtar in Mesopotamia; Devi in ancient India; and Nüwa of China. When archaeologists began finding the Paleolithic Venuses in the 19th century, their first impulses were to link these prehistoric works of art to later cosmologies. Although their theories have been largely superseded, early interpretations of the Venus figurines saw them as religious icons and venerated for their divine nature.

NEFERTITI

ARTISTIC ICON, ENDURING ENIGMA

A pharaoh's queen, a mother, a widow, a timeless Egyptian beauty: Nefertiti was all of these and so much more.

EDITORS OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

MYSTERY WOMAN
This stunning face was uncovered in Amarna by Ludwig Borchardt in 1912. It continues to captivate visitors to the Neues Museum in Berlin, where it is on display today.
BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

The leading woman of all the nobles, great in the palace, perfect of appearance, beautiful in the double plume, the mistress of joy who is united with favour, whose voice people rejoice to hear, great wife of the king, his beloved, the great mistress of the two lands—Neferneferuaten, Nefertiti, granted life for ever, and for eternity!”

Engraved on a stela found at Amarna, Egypt, this glowing passage describes Nefertiti, the great royal wife of Amenhotep IV—better known by the name he adopted later in life—Akhenaten. Her husband radically changed Egypt, transforming its polytheistic state religion to the worship of one deity, the solar disk Aten. He also moved the Egyptian capital to a new city he built named Akhetaten, meaning “horizon of the god Aten.”

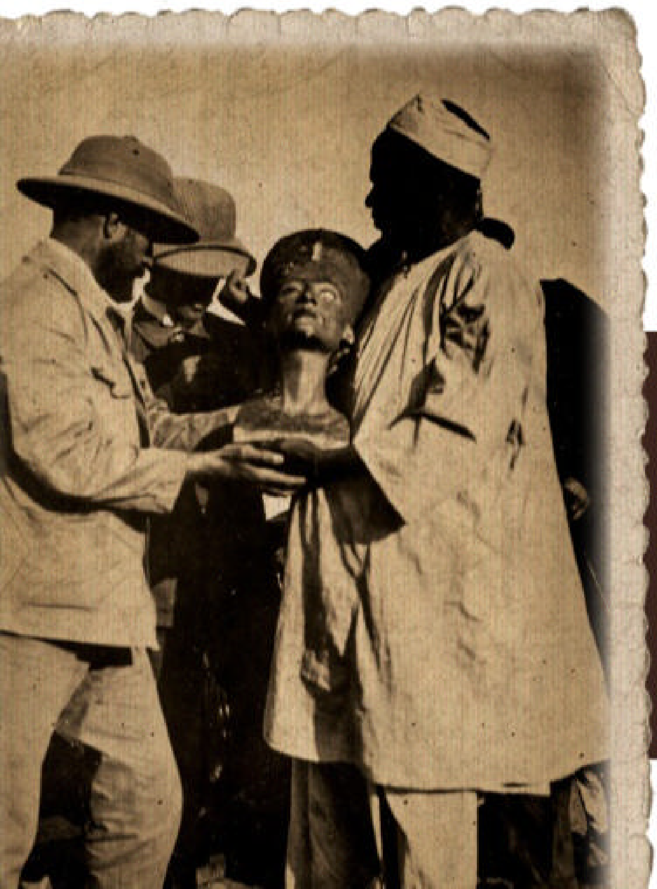
Akhenaten’s revolution was short-lived: Egypt would return to its old faith after his reign. His successors tried to erase his name and legacy. His capital was abandoned, and artworks featuring his likeness and name—and that of his family, including Nefertiti—were defaced. Their legacy would stay buried for millennia.

Although the description of Queen Nefertiti is no doubt embellished, the claim that she was beautiful, “perfect of appearance,” seems to be borne out by the depictions of her that have survived to today. One work of art in particular has become emblematic of female beauty. After more than three millennia in obscurity, its discovery, in the early 20th century, brought Nefertiti world renown.

Famous Face

Nefertiti’s glory resurfaced on December 6, 1912, when German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt uncovered her now iconic bust among the ruins at Amarna. Considered the most stunning depiction of a woman from the ancient world, and perhaps the most famous relic of antiquity, the bust seems the material embodiment of the queen’s name, which means “the beautiful one has come.”

Borchardt discovered the bust while excavating inside the workshop of a court sculptor. The masterpiece had been extraordinarily well preserved during its 3,000-year burial. As Borchardt wrote in his excavation diary: “Colors as if paint was just applied. Work absolutely exceptional. Description is useless, must be seen.” The high cheekbones, slender neck, and the vivid expression of a woman who seems almost to live and breathe has become an icon of beauty and Egyptian artistry.



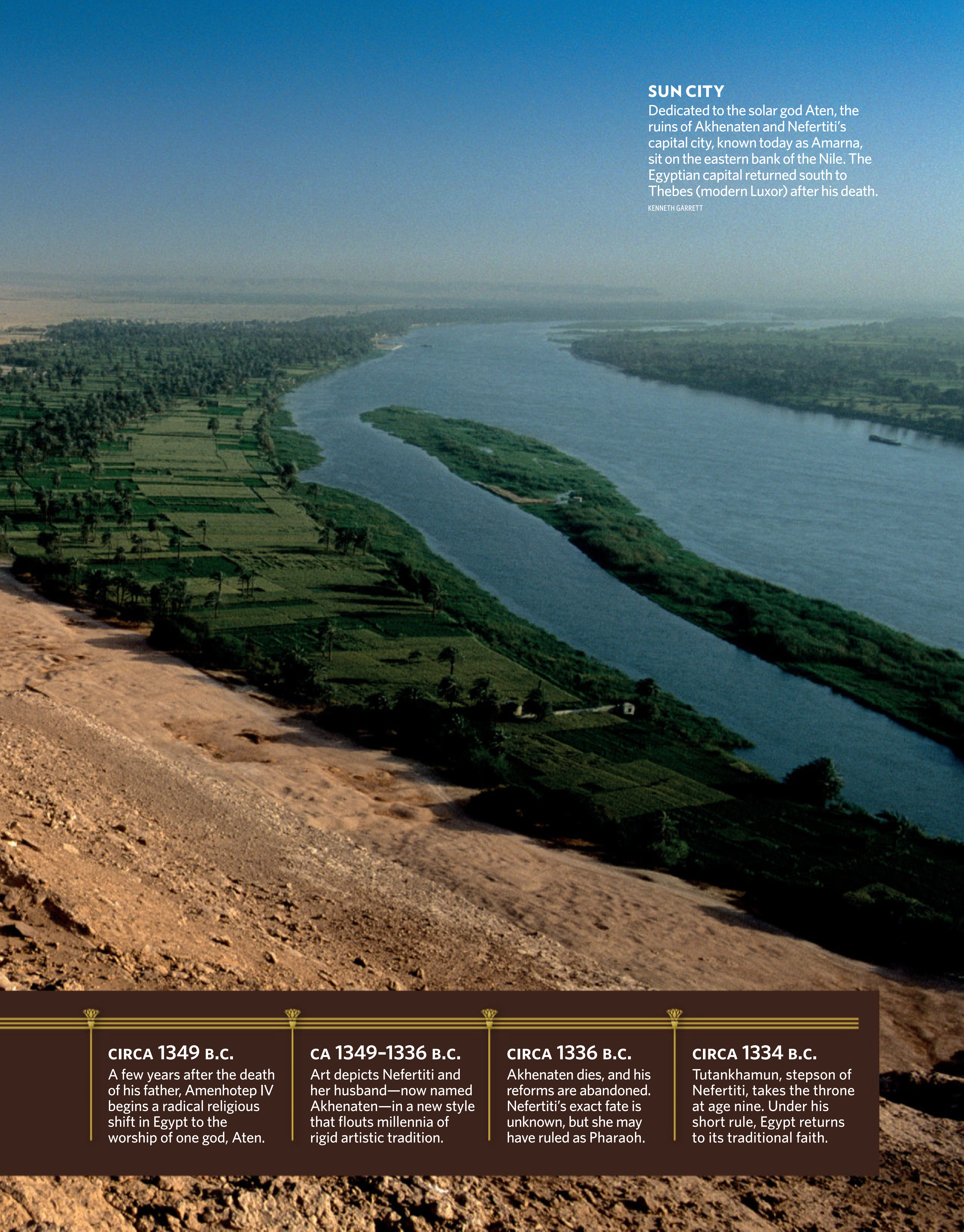
PRESENTATION OF THE NEFERTITI BUST. AMARNA, 1912. EGYPTIAN MUSEUM AND PAPYRUS COLLECTION, NEUES MUSEUM, BERLIN

BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

LIFE OF THE QUEEN

CIRCA 1353 B.C.
Amenhotep III dies, and his long, prosperous reign comes to an end. His son, Amenhotep IV, becomes pharaoh.

CIRCA 1349 B.C.
Nefertiti, one of Amenhotep IV’s wives, becomes his great royal wife. The couple will have six daughters.



SUN CITY

Dedicated to the solar god Aten, the ruins of Akhenaten and Nefertiti's capital city, known today as Amarna, sit on the eastern bank of the Nile. The Egyptian capital returned south to Thebes (modern Luxor) after his death.

KENNETH GARRETT

CIRCA 1349 B.C.

A few years after the death of his father, Amenhotep IV begins a radical religious shift in Egypt to the worship of one god, Aten.

CA 1349–1336 B.C.

Art depicts Nefertiti and her husband—now named Akhenaten—in a new style that flouts millennia of rigid artistic tradition.

CIRCA 1336 B.C.

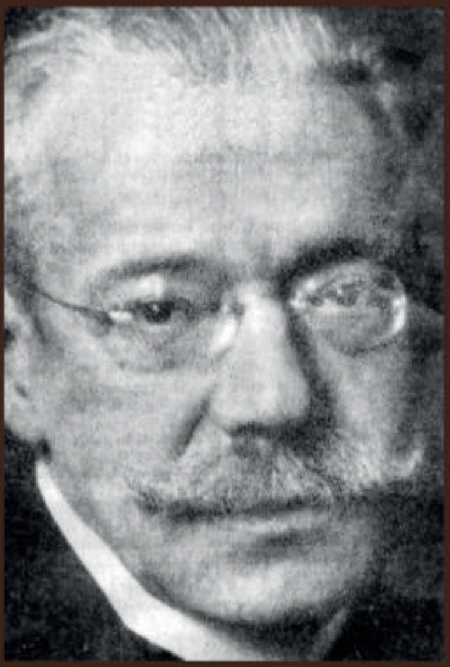
Akhenaten dies, and his reforms are abandoned. Nefertiti's exact fate is unknown, but she may have ruled as Pharaoh.

CIRCA 1334 B.C.

Tutankhamun, stepson of Nefertiti, takes the throne at age nine. Under his short rule, Egypt returns to its traditional faith.

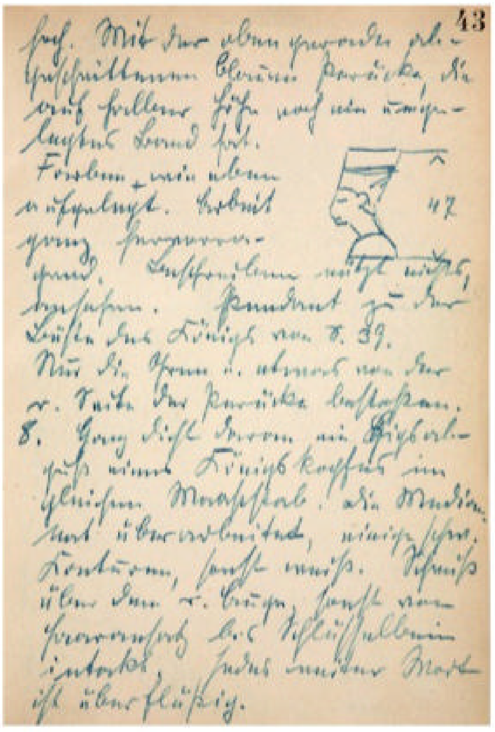
Backer of the Expedition

JAMES SIMON (1851–1932) sponsored Borchardt's archaeological expedition to Egypt through the Germany Oriental Society and was the first owner of the famous Nefertiti bust. When the treasures from Amarna were divided between Egypt and Germany, it was Simon who received the German share, which included the beautiful Nefertiti bust. A Berliner, Simon was heir to a cotton trading company and among the wealthiest men in Germany. In 1920 he donated the bust, along with other magnificent antiquities, to the German government. When Egypt later asked for the bust's return, Simon backed their claim, but Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Berlin State Museums, opposed it. Simon was a great patron of art and archaeology, and a philanthropist who donated a third of his wealth to poor people. Simon died in Berlin and was buried in its Jewish cemetery. In 2019 the James-Simon-Galerie opened on Berlin's Museum Island.



HENRI JAMES SIMON, PHOTOGRAPHED CIRCA 1895

ALAMY/ACI



FIRST GLIMPSES OF NEFERTITI IN BORCHARDT'S NOTEBOOK FROM 1912, EGYPTIAN MUSEUM AND PAPYRUS COLLECTION, NEUES MUSEUM, BERLIN

BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

Despite the discovery of the Amarna bust in 1912, Nefertiti's name is barely mentioned in many histories of Egypt written by 20th-century Western scholars such as Arthur Weigall and Will Durant. For many of their contemporaries, Akhenaten's sweeping religious and political reform takes center stage, while Nefertiti plays a supportive role of the beautiful great royal wife and mother. Recent scholarship is revealing her role to be far more complex, involving her in affairs of state, especially in establishing the monotheistic worship of Aten.

Who Was Nefertiti?

Detailed documentation of Nefertiti's life is fragmented at best. Both the dates of her birth and death are unknown. Historians have been able to establish that Nefertiti was raised in the Egyptian royal court of unheralded parentage. She lived a privileged life as a child, surrounded by the splendor and ritual of Pharaoh Amenhotep III's long reign. Egypt was wealthy and secure during his rule. She married the heir to the throne in her teens, although some believe she may have been younger. Amenhotep IV succeeded his father sometime in his mid-20s or early 30s. During the fourth year of his reign, Nefertiti became his great royal wife.

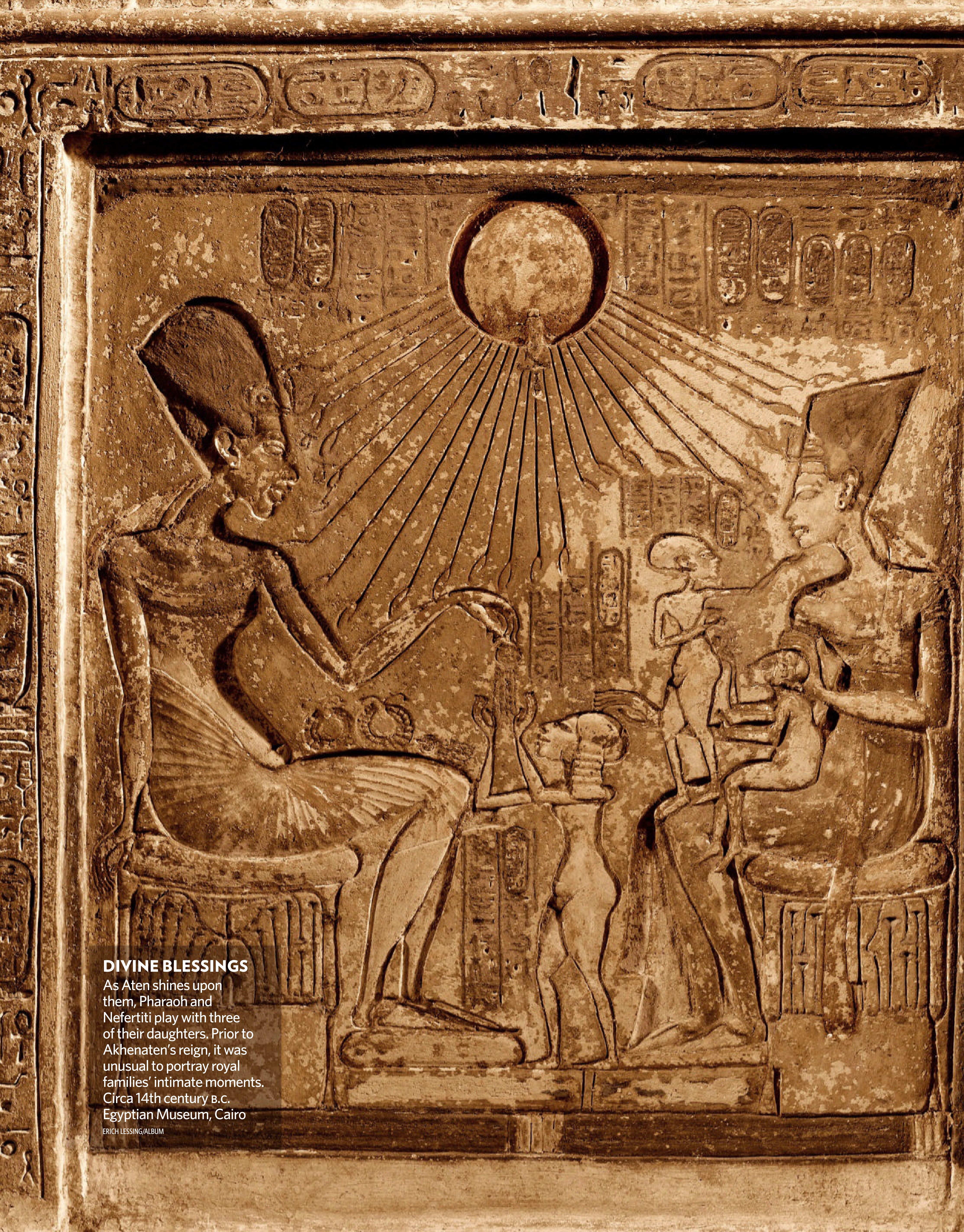
Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten ("he who is beneficial to the Aten") sometime after the fifth year of his reign. Nefertiti enjoyed status and visibility unlike any woman in Egyptian history had enjoyed, including her images in art, in statuary, and on buildings. Above all, she became what Egyptologist Kara Cooney calls his "chief priestess and ideological muse." As part of the religious shift, she received a new name as well: Neferneferuaten Nefertiti, which means "the beauty of the beautiful ones of the Aten, the beauty has come."

To make his new religion succeed, Akhenaten needed Nefertiti. She was elevated as co-equal in status in the worship of Aten the sun god, granted honors greater than any Egyptian queen before her, and even given her own temple. The first of their daughters, Meritaten, was born early in the marriage, and would be followed by five sisters. Their children were popular subjects with the court artists for they were the corporeal manifestations of their sacred union, blessed by the sun god Aten that Egypt would come to worship exclusively. In works of art depicting the royal family together, the solar disk of Aten shines its rays down upon them all.

The partnership of Akhenaten and Nefertiti heralded a series of great changes that their rule brought to Egypt—including the relocation of the capital city. The previous one was Thebes (now Luxor), a city closely linked to the ancient polytheistic divinities. In a bid to escape the old order, Akhenaten moved to virgin territory some 250 miles north on the eastern bank of the Nile in Middle Egypt. There he erected his completely new capital, Akhetaten (now known as Amarna), as the center of his mold-breaking monotheism.

Evolving Canons of Beauty

The artwork from the so-called Amarna period (1349–1336 B.C.) revealed the importance



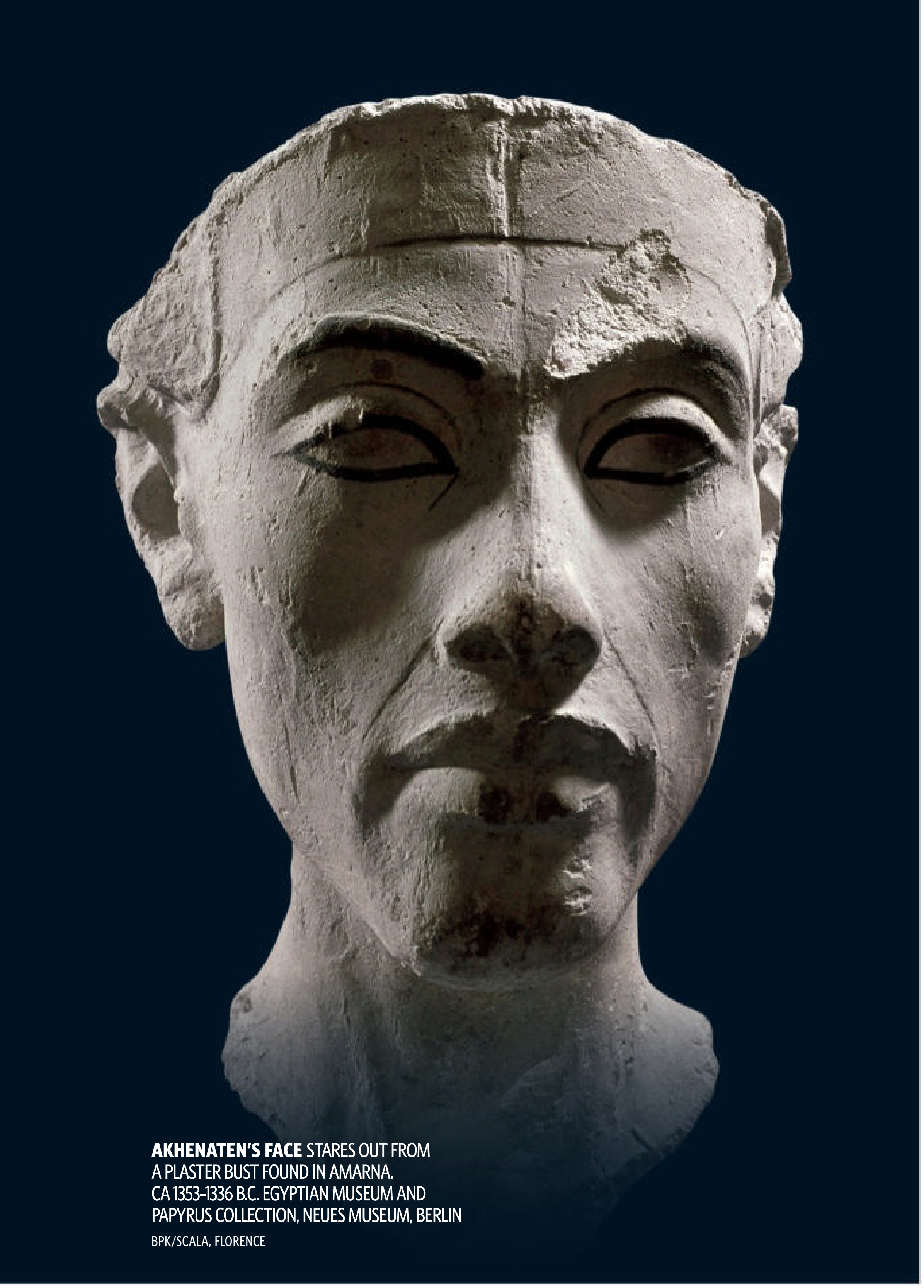
DIVINE BLESSINGS
As Aten shines upon them, Pharaoh and Nefertiti play with three of their daughters. Prior to Akhenaten's reign, it was unusual to portray royal families' intimate moments. Circa 14th century B.C. Egyptian Museum, Cairo

ERICH LESSING/ALBUM

AKHENATEN'S TOMB

The royal tomb of the heretic pharaoh was built east of his capital city, Akhetaten (now known as Amarna). Depictions of Nefertiti appear on its walls along with representations of the god Aten.

KENNETH GARRETT



AKHENATEN'S FACE STARES OUT FROM A PLASTER BUST FOUND IN AMARNA. CA 1353-1336 B.C. EGYPTIAN MUSEUM AND PAPYRUS COLLECTION, NEUES MUSEUM, BERLIN

BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

LOVING CUP
A lotus-shaped goblet created early in Amenhotep IV's reign bears his name and Nefertiti's. Circa 1353–1336 B.C. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

SCALA, FLORENCE

of Nefertiti in her husband's reign. Amarna's impact was revolutionary. During this brief time, the classical canons of art were torn up and replaced. Before the Amarna period, both male and female figures tended to be highly stylized, depicted by a rigid set of standards that were thousands of years old. People, both men and women, were slim and streamlined, rendered in a flat, two-dimensional style with face and body in profile and eyes and shoulders facing front.

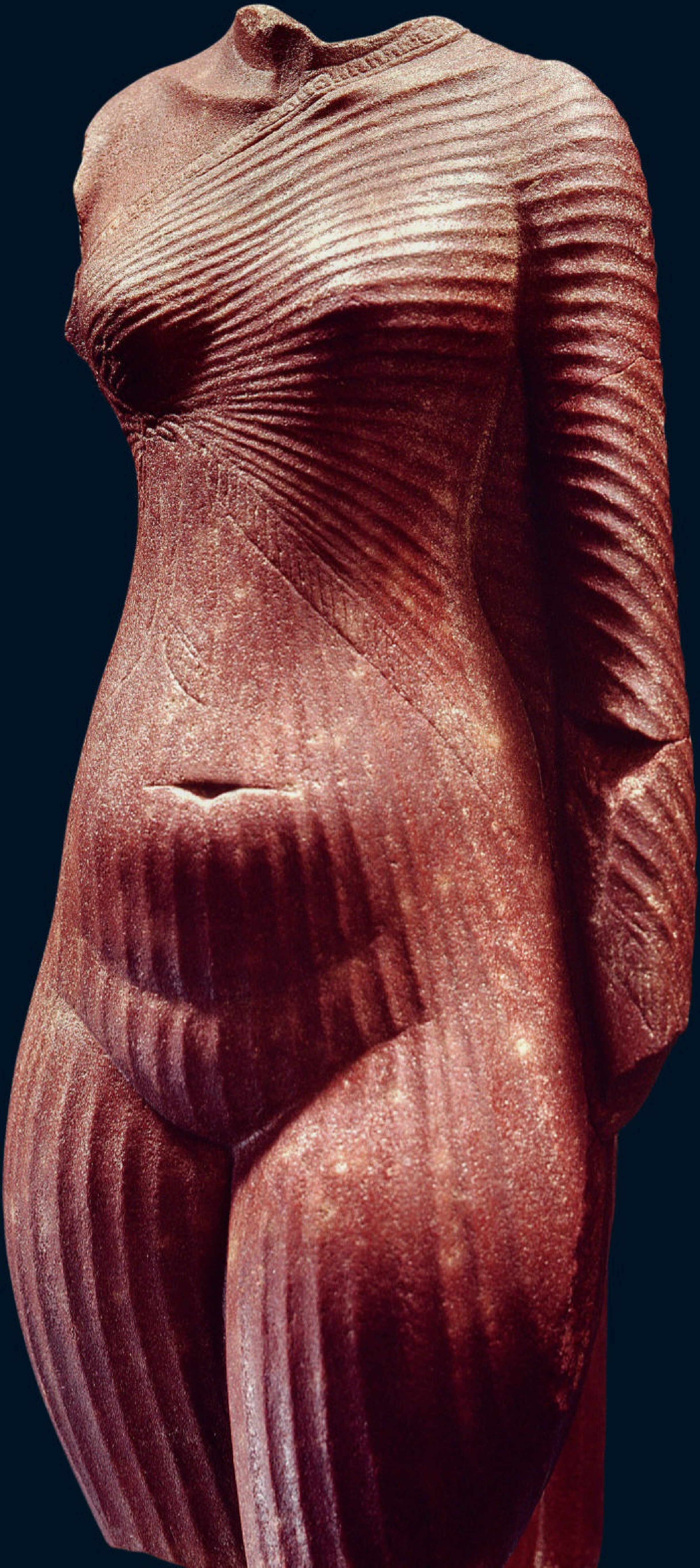
This canon of beauty changed dramatically when Nefertiti reigned. Lines that were previously rigid and straight became fluid, curved, and more natural. Both Akhenaten and Nefertiti were drawn using more sinuous curves; both had luscious lips, long faces and noses, elongated bodies, protruding bellies, and wide hips. In the Amarna style, both male and female figures were rendered similarly, with both male and female traits. Scholars believe this emphasized Aten as being both father and mother to the Egyptian people. The pharaoh, like Aten, needed to embody both parental roles to create an indissoluble unity that would give blessings to Egypt. Artists seemed to delight in creating family portraits of the royal parents and their children, showing them in both moments of happiness and grief. The fullness of their lives is shown, providing an intimate look at the royal family.

The shift in artistic style happened fast, and the rapid pace is linked to Akhenaten's desire for change. Within the context of Egyptian art, representations conveyed a message. When Akhenaten and Nefertiti introduced the worship of a sole god, they used art to preach their new ideology. Art became a tool to underline radical reforms: All previous aesthetic canons had to be eliminated for this new beginning. With the new cult of Aten established, Egyptian art abruptly looked different, the rigid forms of the past giving way to a more fluid aesthetic.

The sculptor Thutmose then began producing unparalleled masterpieces in his Amarna workshop with Nefertiti as one of his popular subjects. Although Egyptian art was changing, its ideals remained the same. A headless red quartzite sculpture in the Louvre Museum, Paris, encapsulates these ideals. It represents a young woman wearing a linen garment, showing her high, narrow waist, pert breasts, and rounded lower body. The model's identity is unknown. It may be Nefertiti herself or one of her daughters, but this ideal image is altogether new, an icon for Aten.

The Queen's Fate

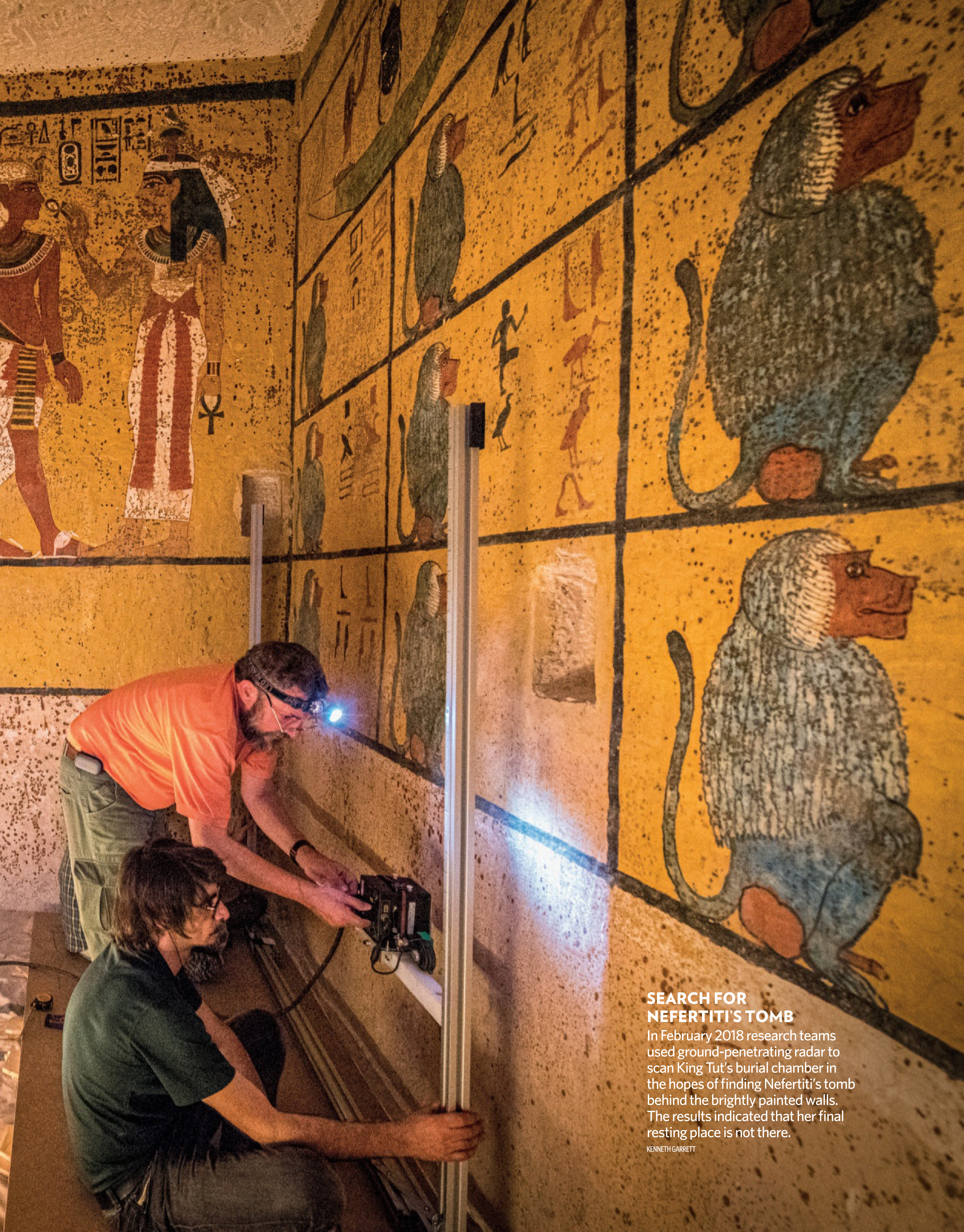
While Nefertiti's family appeared to live in harmony, Egyptian culture, religion, politics, and economy were greatly disrupted, a marked shift from the stability of Akhenaten's father. In 1349 B.C. building a new city far away was a herculean and extremely expensive task, and establishing this capital threw all of Egypt into disarray. The new religion unsettled an entire culture based on polytheism, with an extensive network of priests, temples, and worshippers. The cost in taxes and to the Egyptian treasury was enormous. Thousands of Egyptians, many of them children, were forced into building Aten's new city, monuments, and temples.



DIAPHANOUS DRESS

Meticulously crafted, a statue from the Amarna period depicts a woman wearing a close-fitting, pleated linen dress. It is believed to represent Nefertiti or perhaps one of her daughters. Louvre Museum, Paris

SCALA, FLORENCE



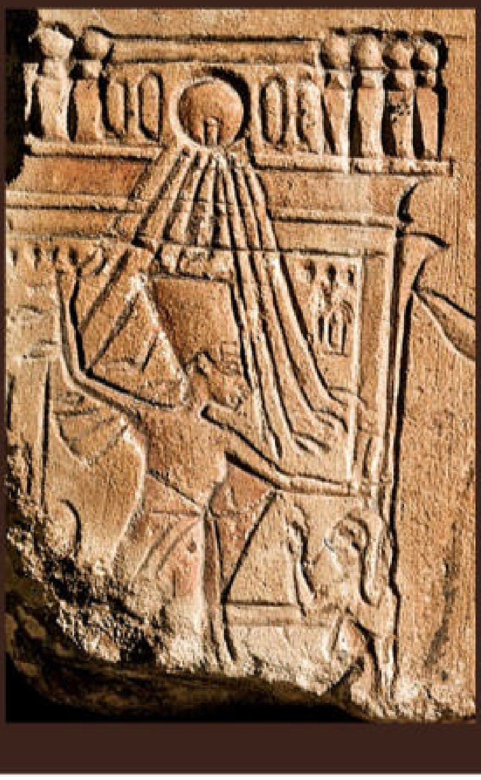
SEARCH FOR NEFERTITI'S TOMB

In February 2018 research teams used ground-penetrating radar to scan King Tut's burial chamber in the hopes of finding Nefertiti's tomb behind the brightly painted walls. The results indicated that her final resting place is not there.

KENNETH GARRETT

All Hail! The Conquering Queen

NEFERTITI played essential roles during her husband's reign, always represented alongside the pharaoh as they celebrated religious ceremonies. An image of the queen actually wielding a mace and slaying her enemies has surprised researchers. Nowhere else in Egyptian art had a woman been shown in such a commanding physical role. In this *talatat* (limestone block), Nefertiti smites a female enemy—another first in Egyptian iconography. Pharaohs were typically depicted killing the enemies of Egypt, symbolizing their sacred role in dominating chaos, but no other Egyptian queen is shown this way until 1,300 years later, during the Meroitic period in Nubia. This talatat may reveal Nefertiti's uniqueness: arguably as a female pharaoh, and as a formidable political, religious—and perhaps military— leader in her own right.



NEFERTITI ATTACKS. *TALATAT* FRAGMENT, CA 1353-1336 B.C. MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON/BRIDGEMAN/ACI

ROYAL SEAL
A gold ring (below) features likenesses of both Akhenaten (left) and Nefertiti (right). Circa 1353–1336 B.C. Metropolitan Museum, New York

SCALA, FLORENCE

Meanwhile, the peace and prosperity of Egypt was waning. Rumbling threats from foreign lands meant that the people needed protection. Egypt, in arguably the wealthiest era in its history, went broke through extravagant spending on the new city, the new religion, and their support system during Akhenaten's rule.

Akhenaten and Nefertiti ruled for about 17 years, and the pharaoh's reign ended with his death around age 40. Egypt would eventually return to its old ways, and Akhenaten would be written out of pharaonic history in Egypt. His monuments and statues were destroyed or dismantled. Worship of Aten ceased, and polytheism was restored, as taxation returned to uphold the ancient (and previously lucrative) traditions. Perhaps above all, the Egyptian capital returned to Thebes. Akhenaten's new capital was abandoned, and it languished in ruined obscurity for more than 3,000 years.

Nefertiti's life after the death of her husband is a subject of great debate among Egyptologists. They agree that she did outlive her husband, but the nature of her role in this time of volcanic change in Egyptian history is undetermined. Perhaps she faded away, or she could have taken on a more prominent role.

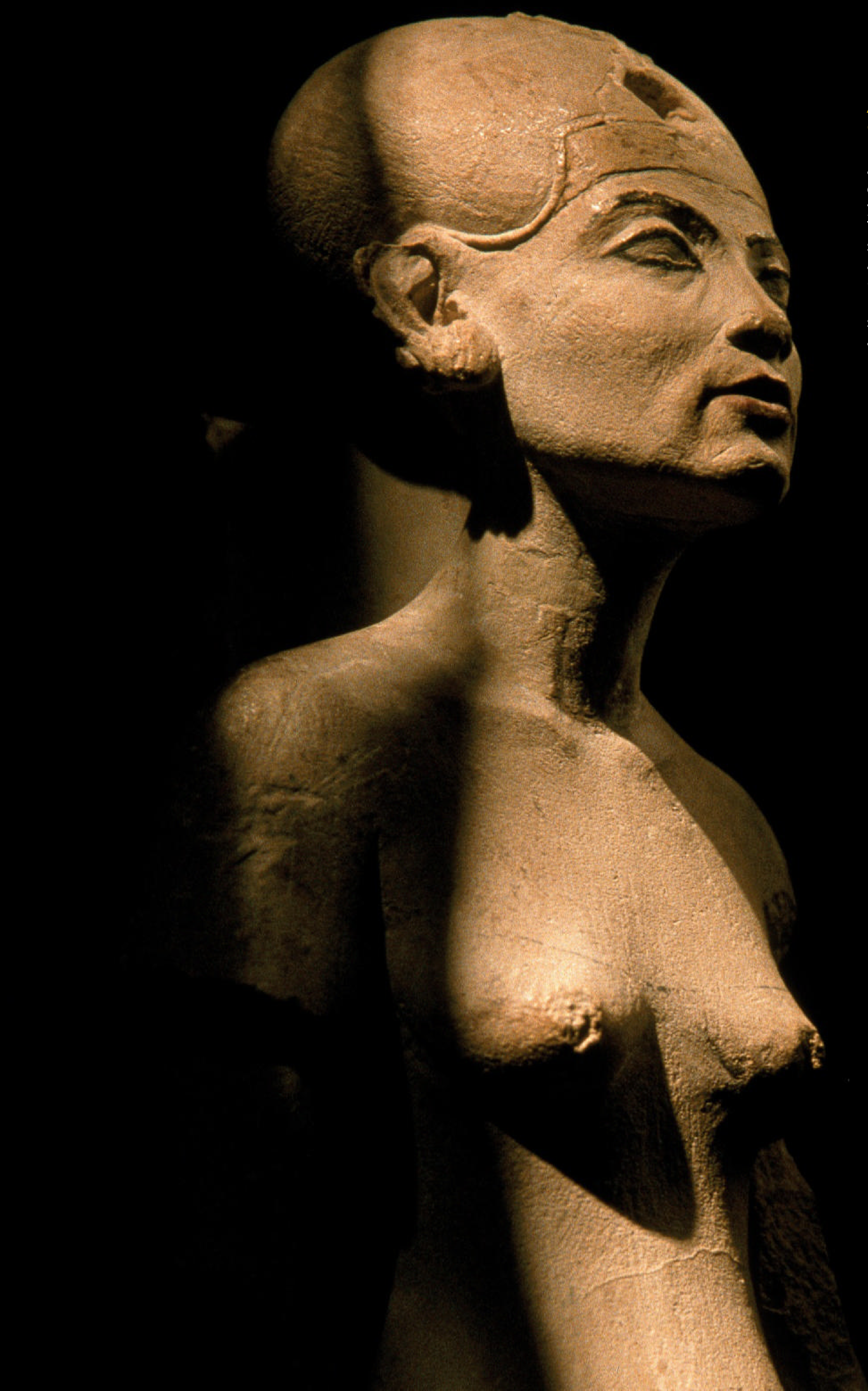
Some 21st-century scholars believe that about five years before his death, Akhenaten elevated his great royal wife to co-king and gave her a new name: Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten. According to this theory, after Akhenaten died, Nefertiti took the throne, ruling under the name Ankhkheperure Smenkhkare and guiding her country into the reign of the next male pharaoh, her stepson Tutankhamun. Cooney writes: "Nefertiti would receive no credit for this political leadership, even though it was she who started the restoration of a country turned upside down."

Nefertiti's final resting place has yet to be found. The Boundary Stelae of Akhenaten, a group of royal monument inscriptions, indicates that she was to be buried in the Royal Tomb of Akhenaten in Amarna, but her tomb is not there. Scholars have begun looking in the Valley of the Kings and even in the tomb of her stepson. Noninvasive radar scans within Tutankhamun's tomb have detected anomalies, and some speculate these spaces could be Nefertiti's final resting place. Recent searches have found no evidence, but the search continues.

Nefertiti's timeless allure is sustained by much more than her physical beauty. The 1912 discovery of the Amarna bust helped spark interest in her, but only more recently have Egyptologists focused on a fuller understanding of her life, including examination of her roles as co-pharaoh and regent. Speculation about her influence in restoring polytheism, financial, and political stability, and cultural traditions to Egypt after Akhenaten's death has never been more intense. Archaeologists are on the hunt for her tomb, and new technologies and heightened interest worldwide make it more likely than ever that it will be found at last. There are so many more questions to be answered about the enduring enigma that was Nefertiti. ■

Learn more

When Women Ruled the World: Six Queens of Egypt
Kara Cooney, National Geographic Books, 2018



AGING GRACEFULLY

Found at Amarna in 1920, a standing limestone statue depicts Nefertiti in her later years. Sculpted around 1353-1336 B.C., the work shows the queen wearing a cap crown, a sheer dress (barely visible sleeves can be seen on the arms), and sandals. Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Neues Museum, Berlin

KENNETH GARRETT

THE QUEEN'S MANY FACES

Nefertiti's reign began when she was a teenage girl and is believed to have lasted into middle age. With their skill and craftsmanship, royal artists were able to capture her likeness during very different stages of her life as she passed through adolescence to womanhood.

1 Nefertiti's subtle smile is highlighted with red pigment in this bust, which probably depicts the young royal as a teenager. Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Neues Museum, Berlin

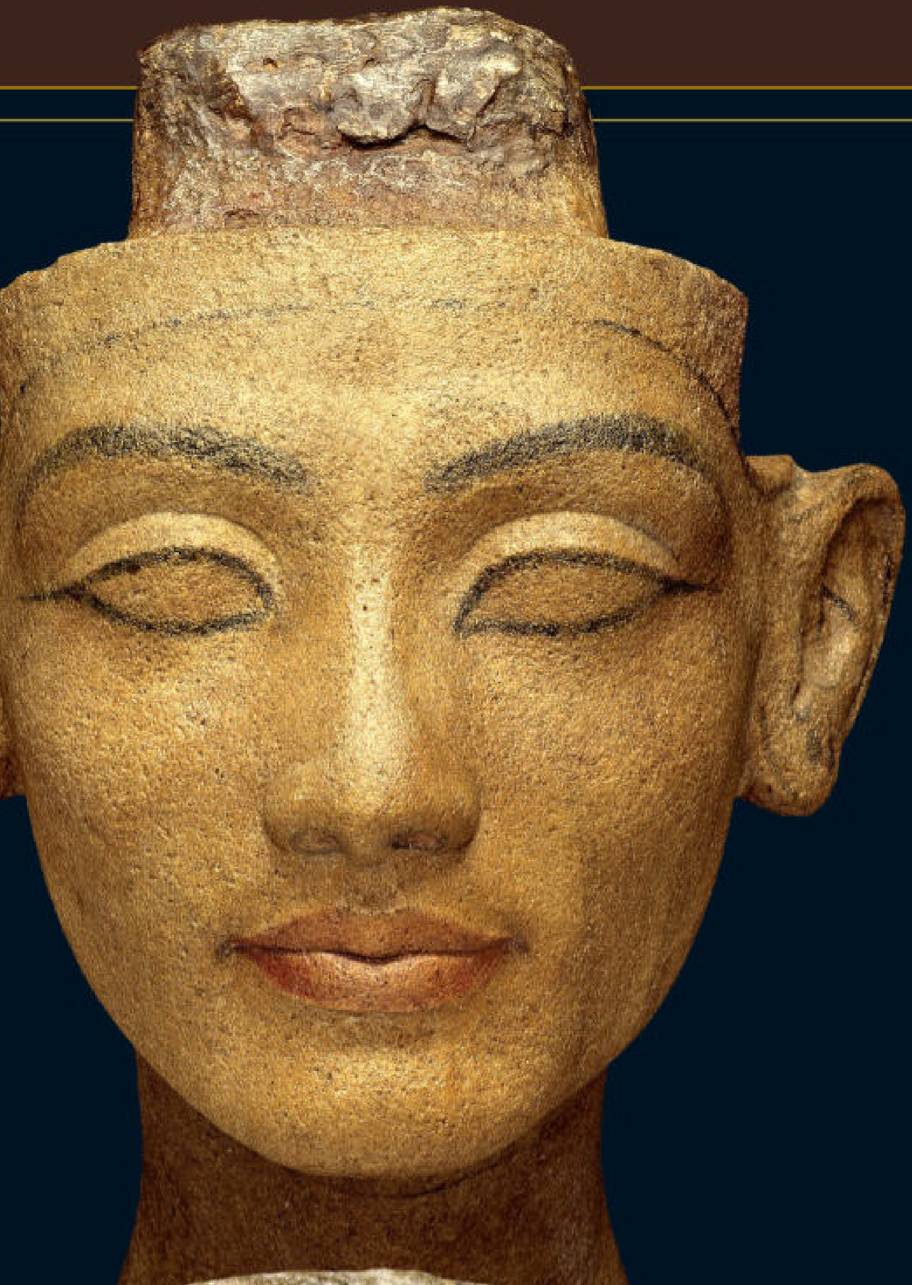
2 In this unfinished bust of the queen, Nefertiti's features are softly rendered, but dark pigments have been used to emphasize her brows and eyes. Egyptian Museum, Cairo

3 Perhaps the most famous portrait in the world, this bust of Nefertiti was found in 1912 by German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt. Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Neues Museum, Berlin

4 The elongated features of an unfinished bust of Nefertiti align closely to the Amarna style associated with her husband, Akhenaten. Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Neues Museum, Berlin

5 Damage to the nose mars the appearance of an exquisitely rendered quartzite head from Memphis that is believed to represent Nefertiti. Egyptian Museum, Cairo

PHOTOS: 1. & 4. BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE. 2 & 5. SCALA, FLORENCE. 3. KENNETH GARRETT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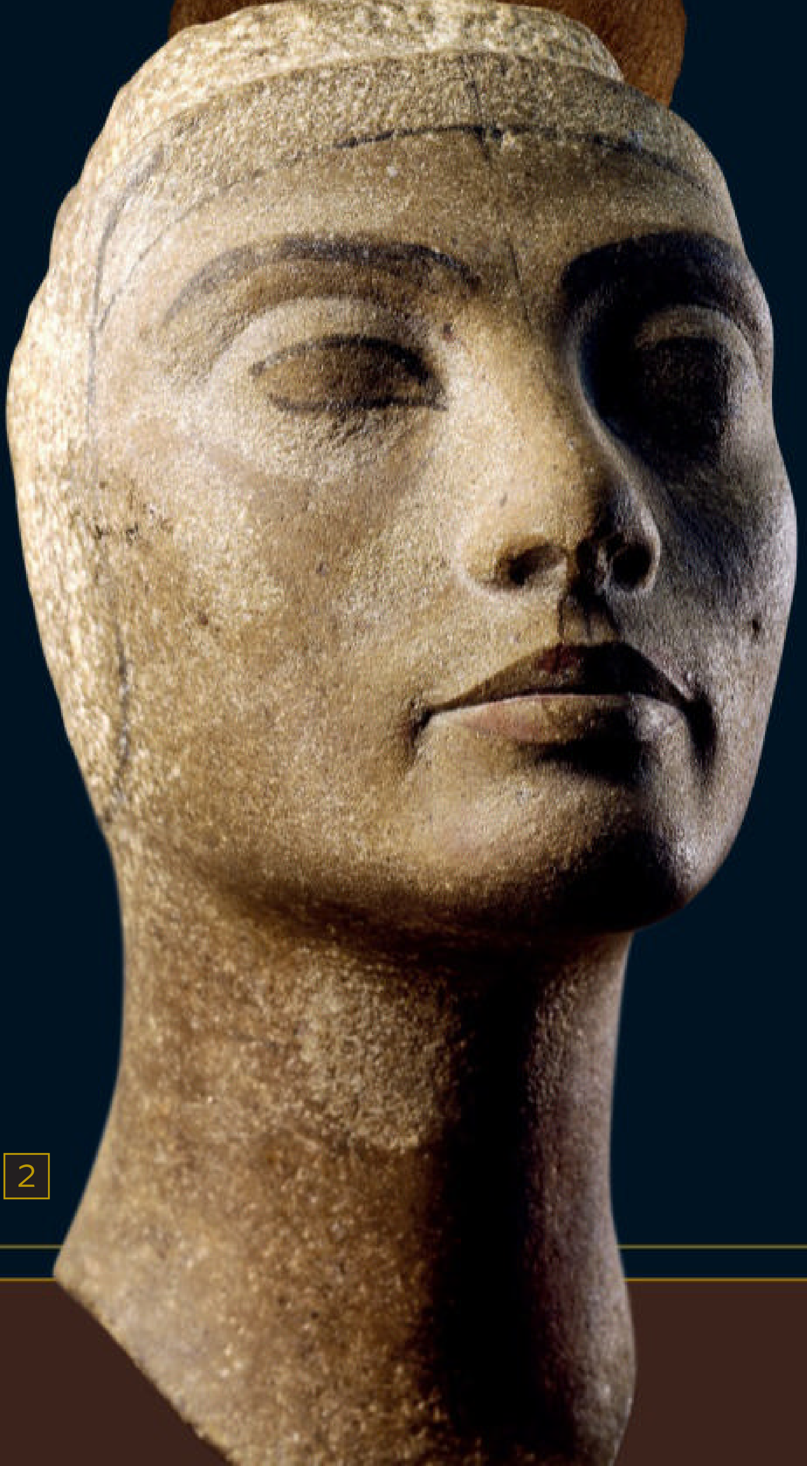
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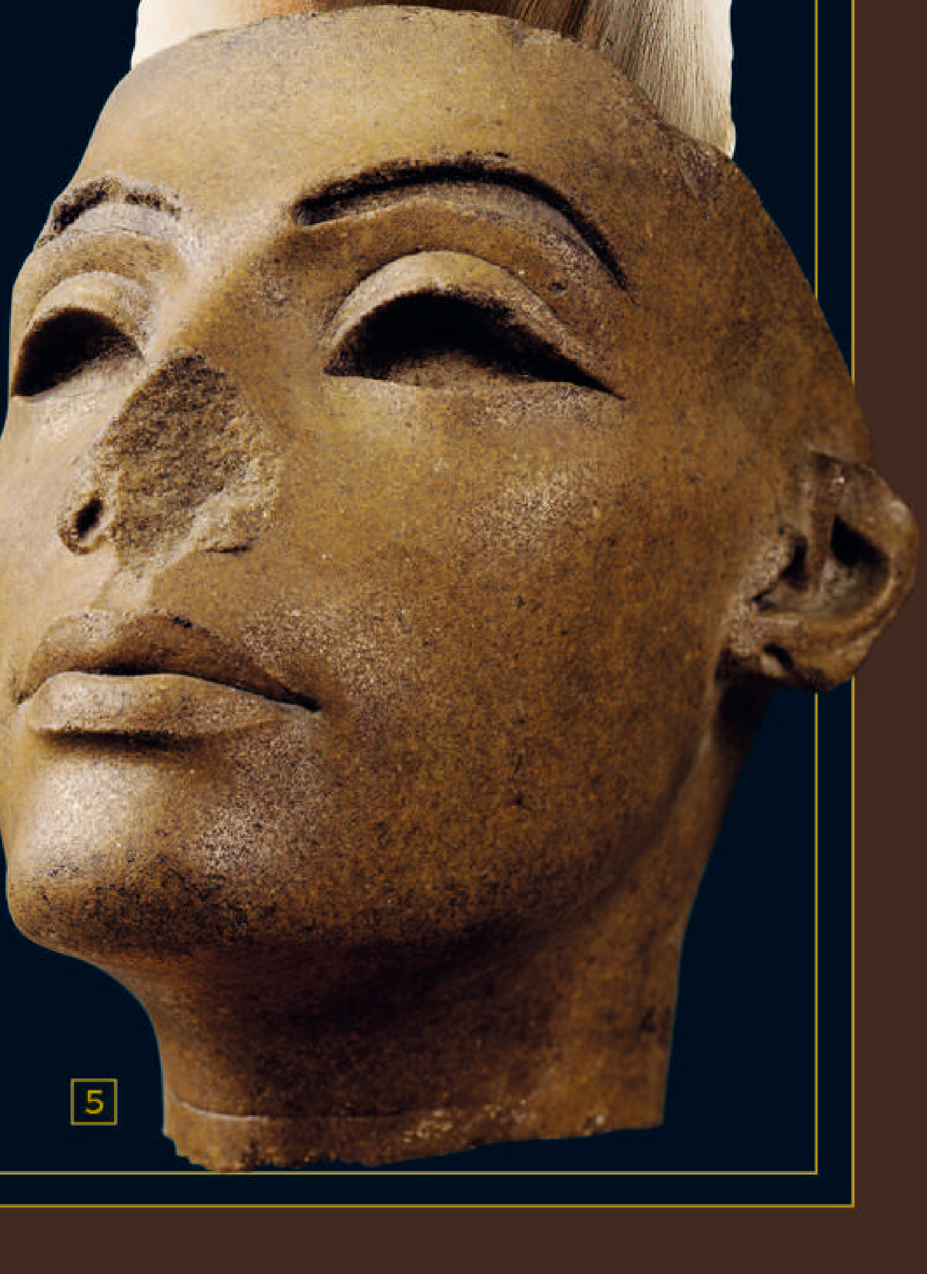

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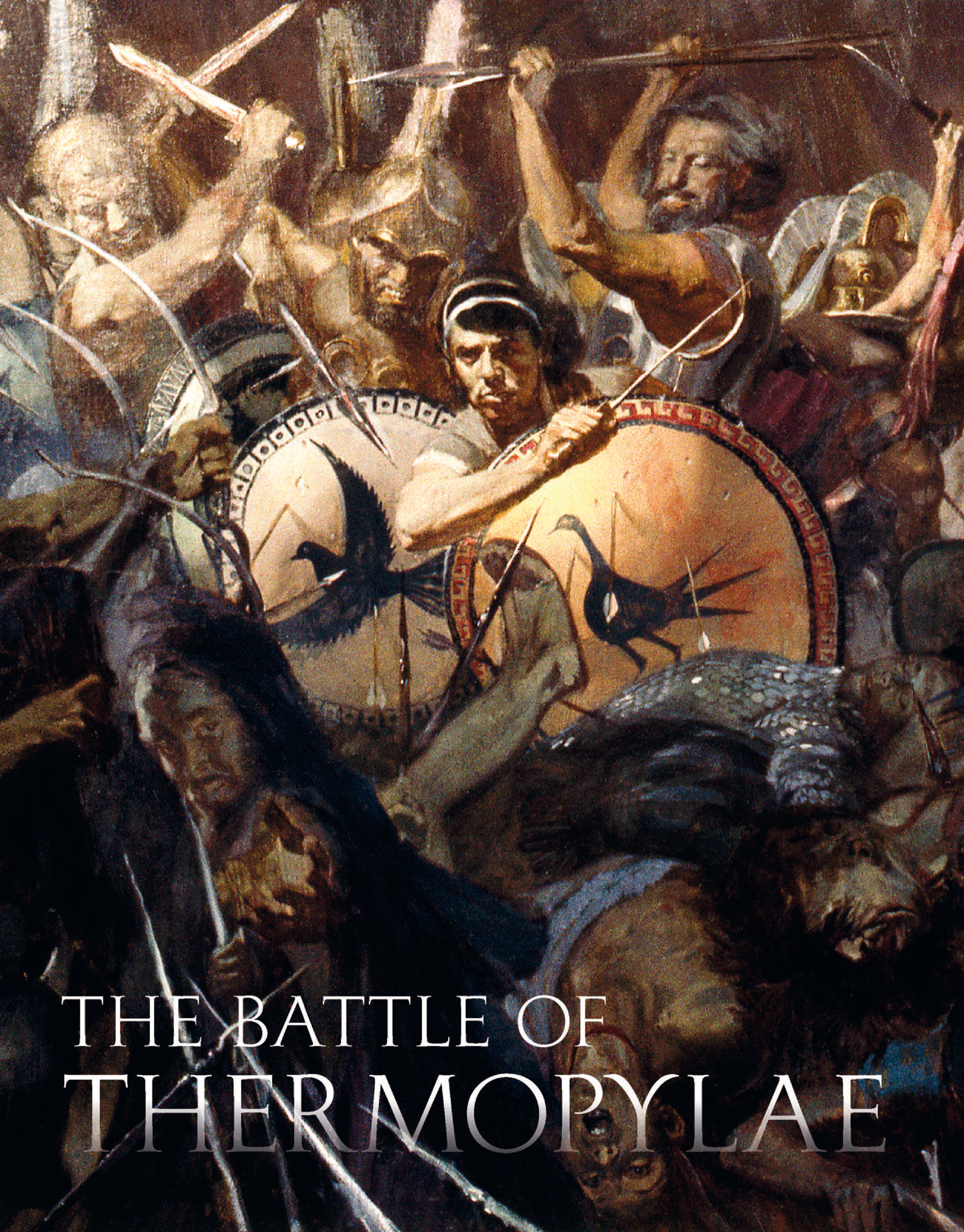
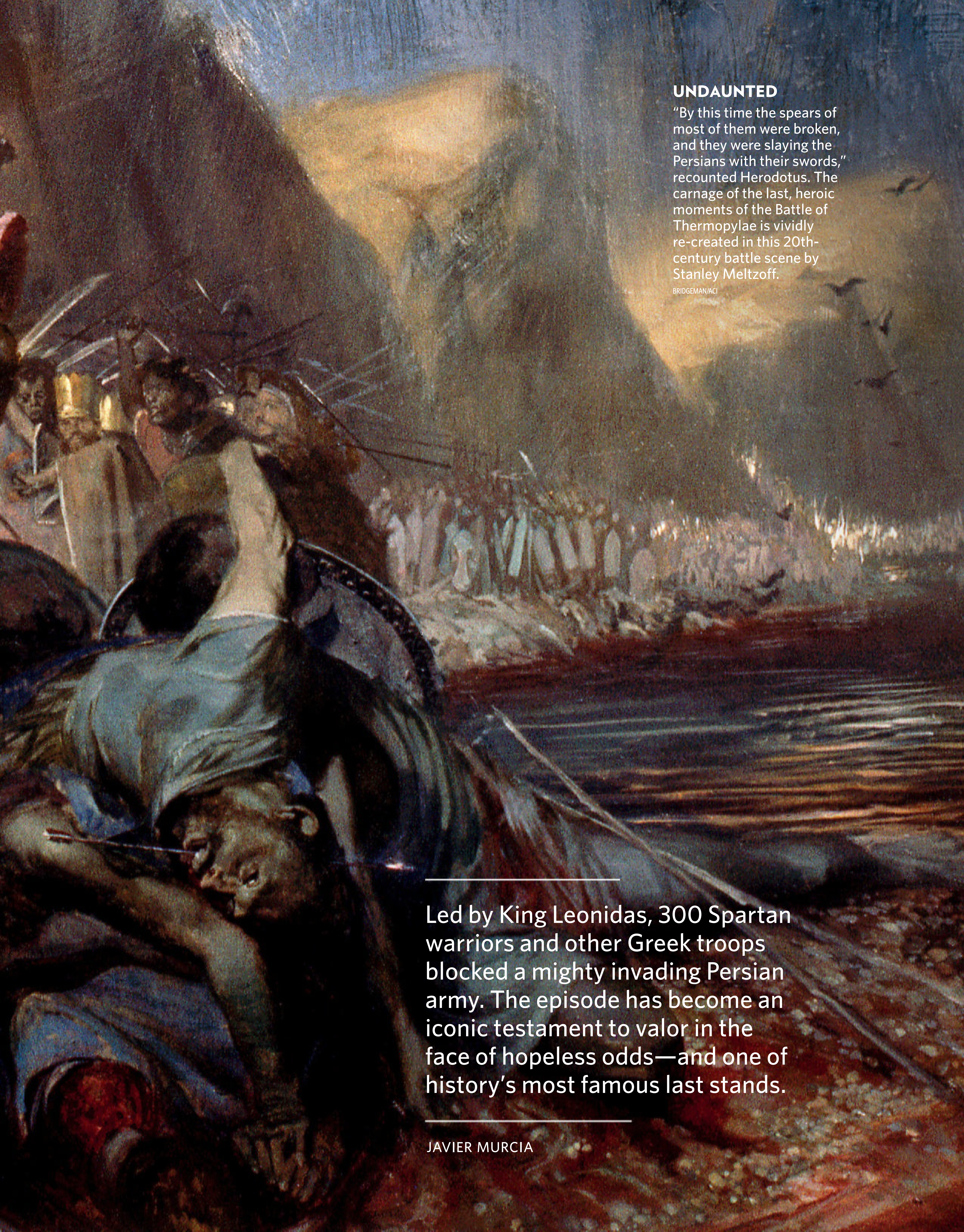


THE BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE



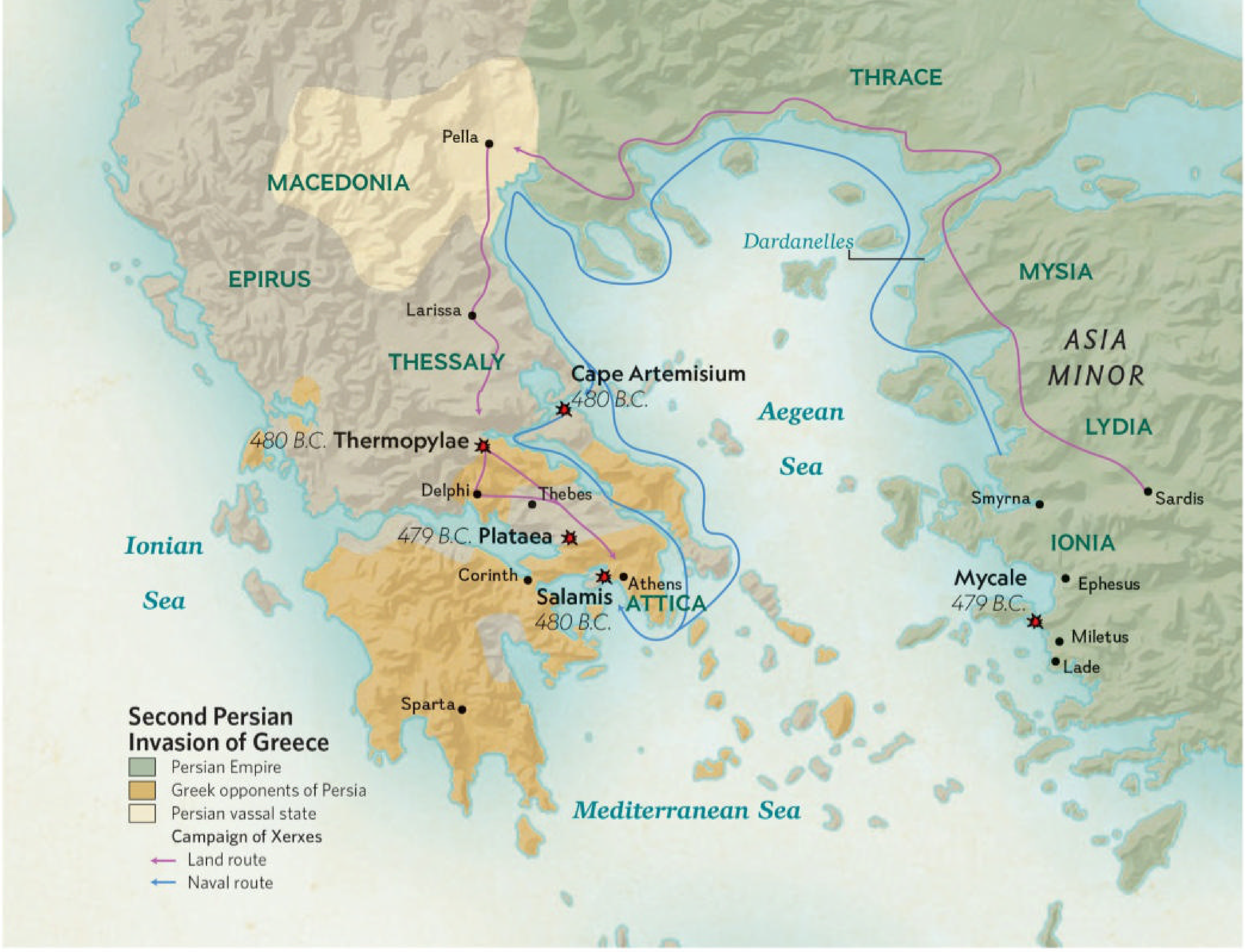
UNDAUNTED

"By this time the spears of most of them were broken, and they were slaying the Persians with their swords," recounted Herodotus. The carnage of the last, heroic moments of the Battle of Thermopylae is vividly re-created in this 20th-century battle scene by Stanley Meltzoff.

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

Led by King Leonidas, 300 Spartan warriors and other Greek troops blocked a mighty invading Persian army. The episode has become an iconic testament to valor in the face of hopeless odds—and one of history's most famous last stands.

JAVIER MURCIA


THRACE
Pella
MACEDONIA
Dardanelles
MYSIA
EPIRUS
Larissa
ASIA MINOR
THESSALY
Cape Artemisium 480 B.C.
Aegean Sea
LYDIA
480 B.C. Thermopylae
Delphi
Thebes
Smyrna
Sardis
Ionian Sea
479 B.C. Plataea
IONIA
Corinth
Athens
Mycale 479 B.C.
Ephesus
Salamis 480 B.C.
ATTICA
Miletus
Lade
Sparta
Mediterranean Sea
Second Persian Invasion of Greece
Persian Empire
Greek opponents of Persia
Persian vassal state
Campaign of Xerxes
Land route
Naval route

BY LAND AND SEA

Above, following Persian advances at Thermopylae and Artemisium, the Greek navy routed the enemy at Salamis. A year later, the Persians were decisively defeated at Plataea and Mycale.

MAP: EOSGIS.COM/NG MAPS

In early June of 480 B.C., a mighty Persian army crossed the Dardanelles strait on two pontoon bridges to continue a brutal advance into Greece. Led by the great king Xerxes, the troops were bound for Thermopylae, a narrow mountain pass named for the area's hot sulfur springs (Thermopylae means "hot gates"). Seated on the east coast of Greece, between the Malian Gulf and the Kallidromo massif, some 85 miles (136 km) northwest of Athens, it is a rugged, craggy landscape of thick brush, thorny shrubs, and steep hillsides, where severe weather—torrential downpours and scorching heat—is the norm.

The dramatically inhospitable four-mile-long pass—the quickest and easiest way to advance from the plains of Thessaly into central Greece—would soon be the site of a legendary battle, an epic, three-day episode that has been memorialized in literature and history as an iconic example of heroic resistance against insurmountable odds.

Facts and Figures

Much of what is known about the Battle of Thermopylae (and about the Greco-Persian wars generally) comes from the Greek historian Herodotus, who wrote in the fifth century B.C. Other

THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS

499 B.C.

The Greek cities of Asia Minor rise up against the Persian Empire and request support from their Greek compatriots. Their rebellion will be put down five years later.

490 B.C.

Darius I decides to punish Athens for supporting the Greeks of Asia Minor. But the Athenian general Miltiades defeats the mighty Persian army at Marathon.

480 B.C.

Xerxes launches a new invasion of Greece. Spartan-led forces briefly slow the advance at Thermopylae; the Athenian navy trounces the Persians at Salamis.

PERSIA'S CAPITAL

Persepolis was founded by Darius I, also known as Darius the Great—the king who initiated the war against Greece that his son Xerxes then continued.

SHUTTERSTOCK

479 B.C.

At the decisive battles of Plataea and Mycale, the Greek army defeats and definitively expels Persian forces from Greece to bring Xerxes' invasion to an end.

GOLDEN KING OF PERSIA

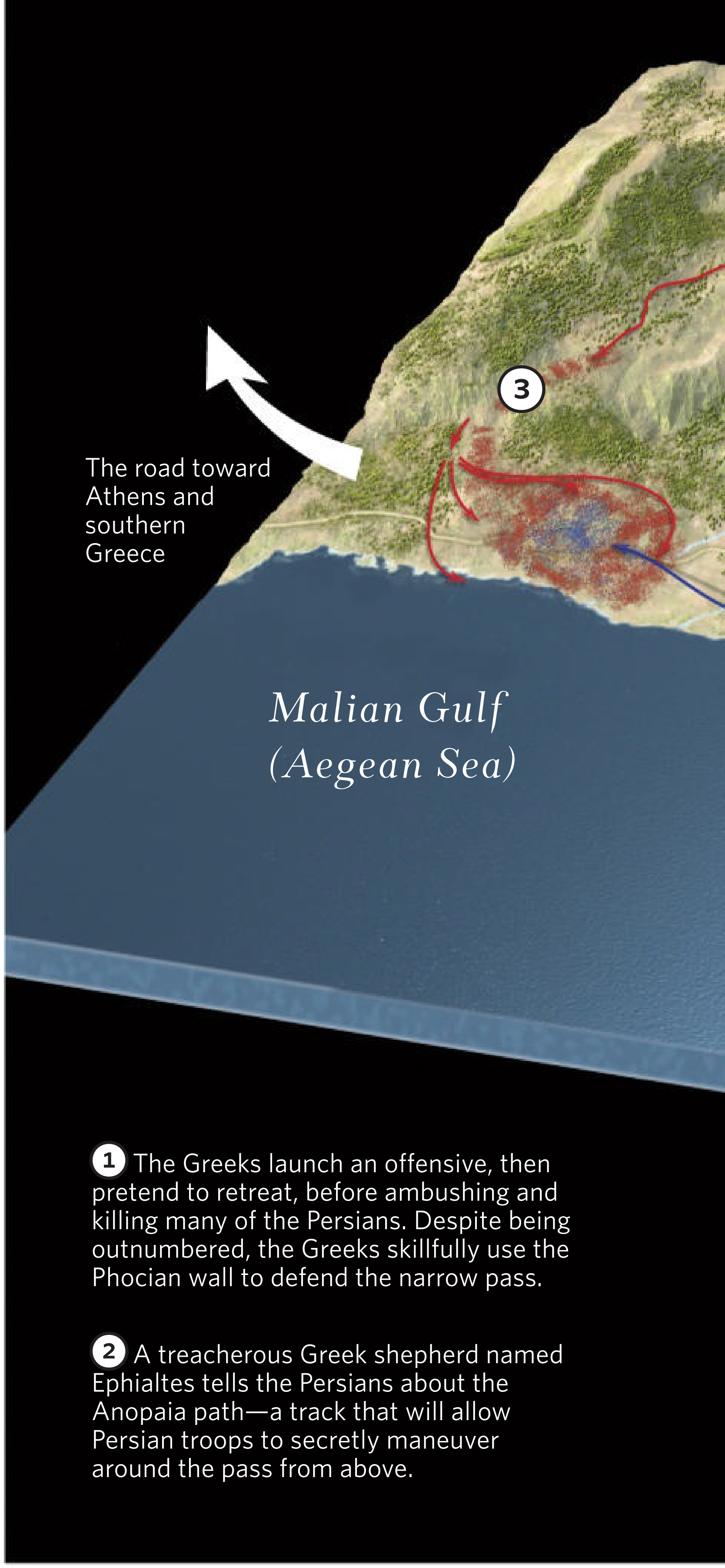
A gold daric from the fifth century B.C. (above) bears the effigy of a Persian king (probably Xerxes I) armed with a bow and a spear.

GRANGER/ACI

sources include the Sicilian historian Diodorus Siculus (whose first-century B.C. account was based in part on the earlier Greek historian Ephorus), the ancient Greeks Plutarch and Ctesias of Cnidus, the modern historian George Beardoe Grundy (who performed a topographical survey of the narrow pass at Thermopylae), and to a lesser extent, the Greek tragedian Aeschylus. No Persian account of the battle has survived.

Many statistics related to the epic battle, however, remain hazy. The number of troops under Xerxes' command, for instance, is the subject of endless debate. According to Herodotus, the Persian king's military personnel numbered 2.6 million in all. His contemporary Simonides, a poet, put the number at four million. Ctesias, meanwhile, counted 800,000, while modern scholarly estimates—based on the Persians' logistical capabilities and constraints during that era—fall between 120,000 and 300,000.

One thing most sources agree on is that the battle was born of both vengeance and ambition. Darius, the father of Xerxes, had been defeated by the Greeks on the plain of Marathon, near Athens, a decade prior—a battle that had conclusively ended the first Persian invasion of Greece. Ten years later, Xerxes was bent on getting even—and ultimately ahead, by subjugating all of Greece, and thereby expanding the Persian Empire westward.



① The Greeks launch an offensive, then pretend to retreat, before ambushing and killing many of the Persians. Despite being outnumbered, the Greeks skillfully use the Phocian wall to defend the narrow pass.

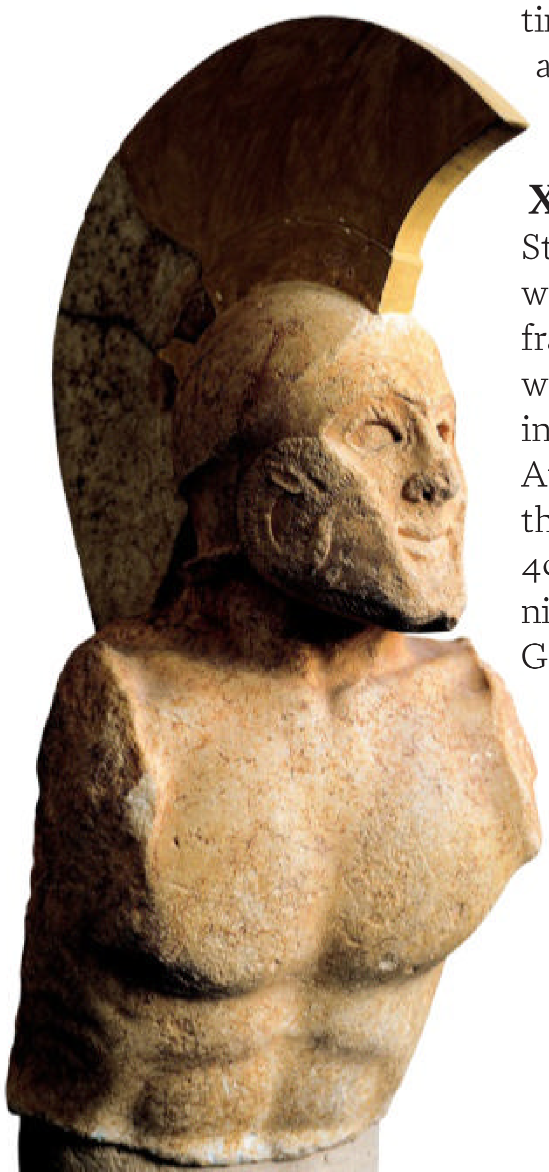
② A treacherous Greek shepherd named Ephialtes tells the Persians about the Anopaia path—a track that will allow Persian troops to secretly maneuver around the pass from above.

Xerxes Attacks

Standing in his way in the summer of 480 B.C. was a rare confederate alliance of normally fractious Greek city-states—some of which were forced to suspend war with each other in order to face the greater threat from Persia. Athens, which had supported Greek cities in the Ionian Revolt and later defeated Darius in 490, led the coalition with Sparta. The Athenian politician and general Themistocles led the Greek naval opposition, blocking the Persian fleet at the strait of Artemisium. Leonidas, king of Sparta, commanded the ground forces at Thermopylae: 300 members of his royal Spartan bodyguard, called the *hippeis*—the subjects of countless books, movies, poems, and songs—along with a lesser-celebrated contingent of 7,000 soldiers in all, including 1,000 Phocians, 700 Thespians, and 400 Thebans.

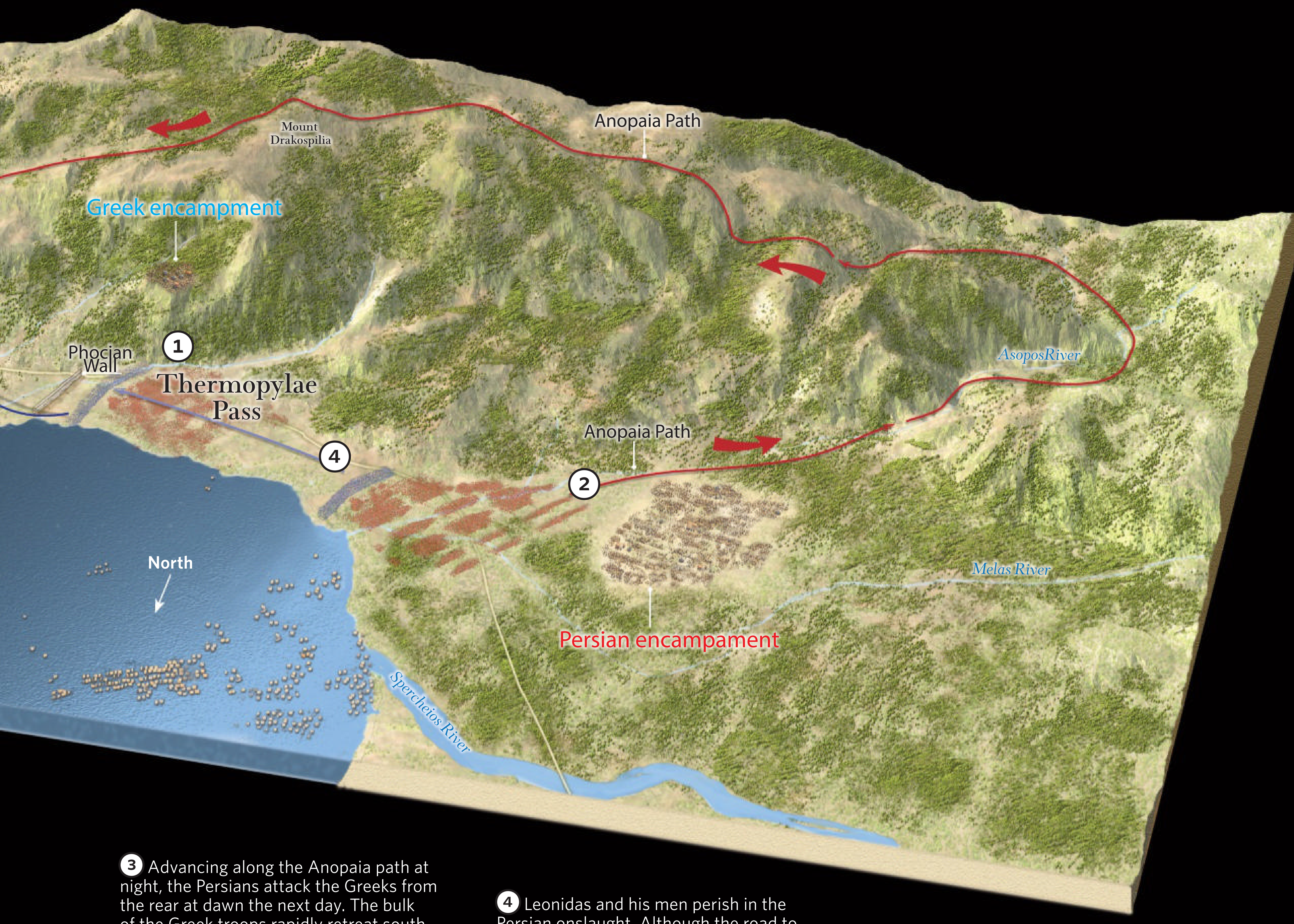
Leonidas, age about 60, had ascended the throne around 490 B.C., after the previous king,

> Leonidas was dismayed to learn that a mountain trail could allow the invaders to circumvent his position.



LEONIDAS, MARBLE BUST, FIFTH CENTURY B.C. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF SPARTA

BRIDGEMAN/ACI



③ Advancing along the Anopaia path at night, the Persians attack the Greeks from the rear at dawn the next day. The bulk of the Greek troops rapidly retreat south. However, Leonidas, 300 of his elite Spartan fighters, and a small group of Theban soldiers decide to fight to the end.

④ Leonidas and his men perish in the Persian onslaught. Although the road to the south now lies open to the Persians, Leonidas's stand has enabled the bulk of the Greek forces to retreat intact.

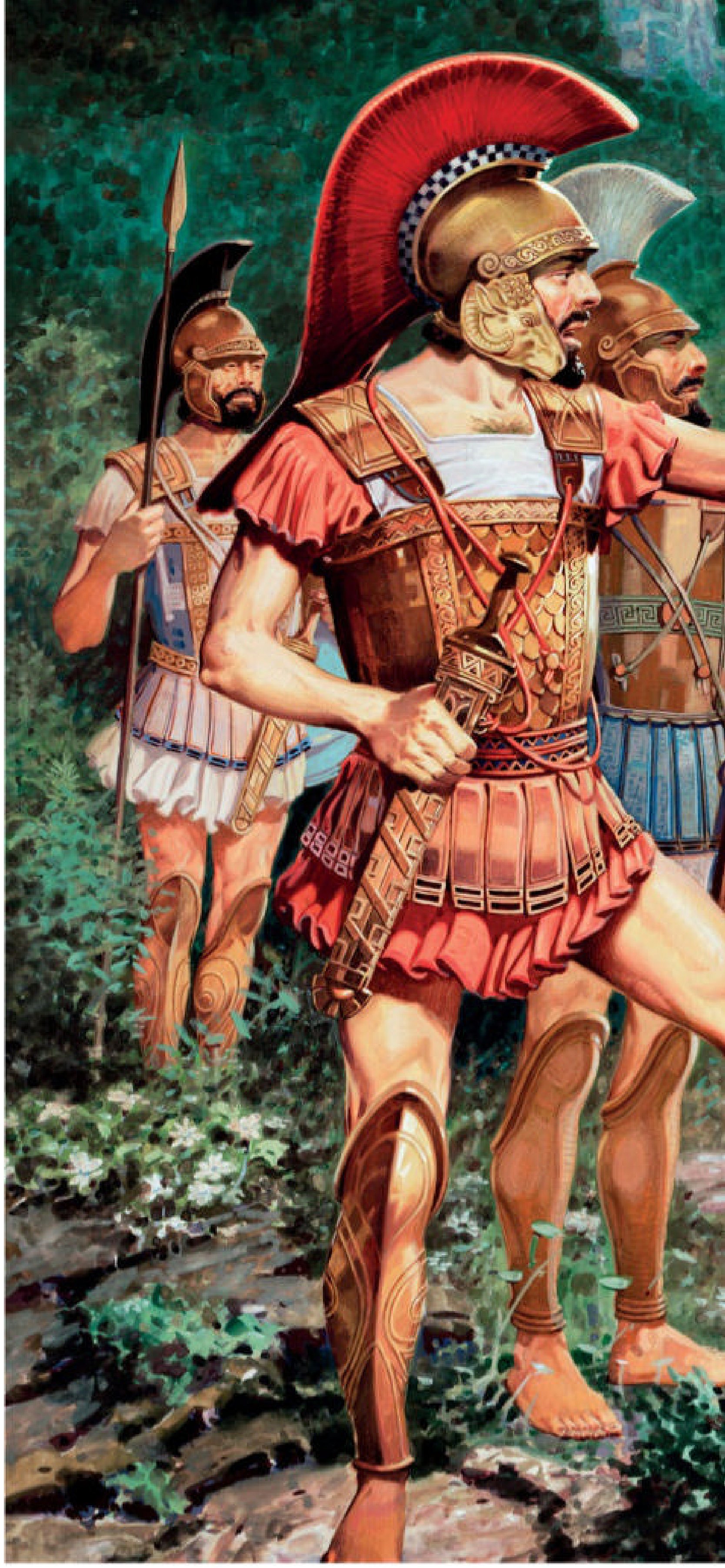
his half brother, Cleomenes, died heirless. The 300 Spartans with him were an elite cadre whom Leonidas had chosen personally. He wanted only soldiers with descendants to accompany him, since he knew there was little chance of them surviving and wanted to be sure that their lineages would continue. Plutarch wrote that when the king was asked before the battle, "What, Leonidas, do you come to fight so great a number with so few?" he replied laconically, "I have enough, since they are to be killed."

Xerxes' forces had advanced with ease through the regions of Thrace, Macedonia, and Thessaly, where the overawed inhabitants surrendered without a fight. When Xerxes arrived at Thermopylae in mid-August, he met a stern resistance that was ready for him.

AT THE HOT GATES

THERMOPYLAE WAS A NARROW PASS less than four miles long that ran between mountains to the south and the sea to the north. Along its length were three narrowing points, known in antiquity as "gates." One gate was on the eastern stretch, one was on the western stretch, and one, in the center, was beside a hot spring. This gave rise to the name Thermopylae, meaning "hot gates." Xerxes amassed his army before the western gate. While the center gate was a bit wider, the entry points at each end of the gorge were so narrow that, according to Herodotus, only one cart could pass through them at a time. Years before the Battle of Thermopylae, the Phocians built a wall to prevent incursions from the north by the Thessalians, a structure that aided the Greeks' initial repulsion of the Persian advance.

ILLUSTRATION: EOSGIS.COM/NG MAPS



Best-Laid Plans

Leonidas's plan was to hold Xerxes at the narrow pass—advantageous terrain that would act as a force multiplier for an army of inferior size. Restricted by the narrow gorge, the Persians would be unable to capitalize on their superior troop numbers, or to use their cavalry. Meanwhile, the Greek fleet could concentrate on defeating the Persian forces in the strait north of the island of Euboea, which lay close by.

That was the plan, but when Leonidas arrived at Thermopylae, he was perturbed to discover that a mountain trail—the Anopaia path—could allow the invaders to circumvent his position. It was too late to change the strategy, however; the fleet was already in position. Leonidas charged the thousand Phocians with guarding the path while his men repaired a wall that protected an opening in the middle of the pass.

Xerxes set up camp near Thermopylae and bided his time for four days. He was convinced that the Greeks, upon seeing his mighty army, would be overcome with fear and retreat. According to Plutarch, he sent a messenger to Leonidas urging him to lay down his arms, but the Spartan king, according to Plutarch, replied, "*Molon labe!*—Come and take them!"

On the fifth day, the Persian attack began. Their advantage in numbers was of no benefit in this tight space, as Leonidas had anticipated. While they had an abundance of courage and stamina, they were poorly trained for this terrain and lacked heavy weaponry. Their swords were shorter than those of the Greeks, and their shields were smaller. Their bows and arrows also proved useless against the Greeks' stout shields.

The tight space suited the Greeks, who were used to fighting in a phalanx formation, shoulder to shoulder, presenting a wall of shields to the enemy. It was an opportunity for the Spartans, in particular, to demonstrate their fighting capacity—the fruits of a life given over, body and soul, to the military.

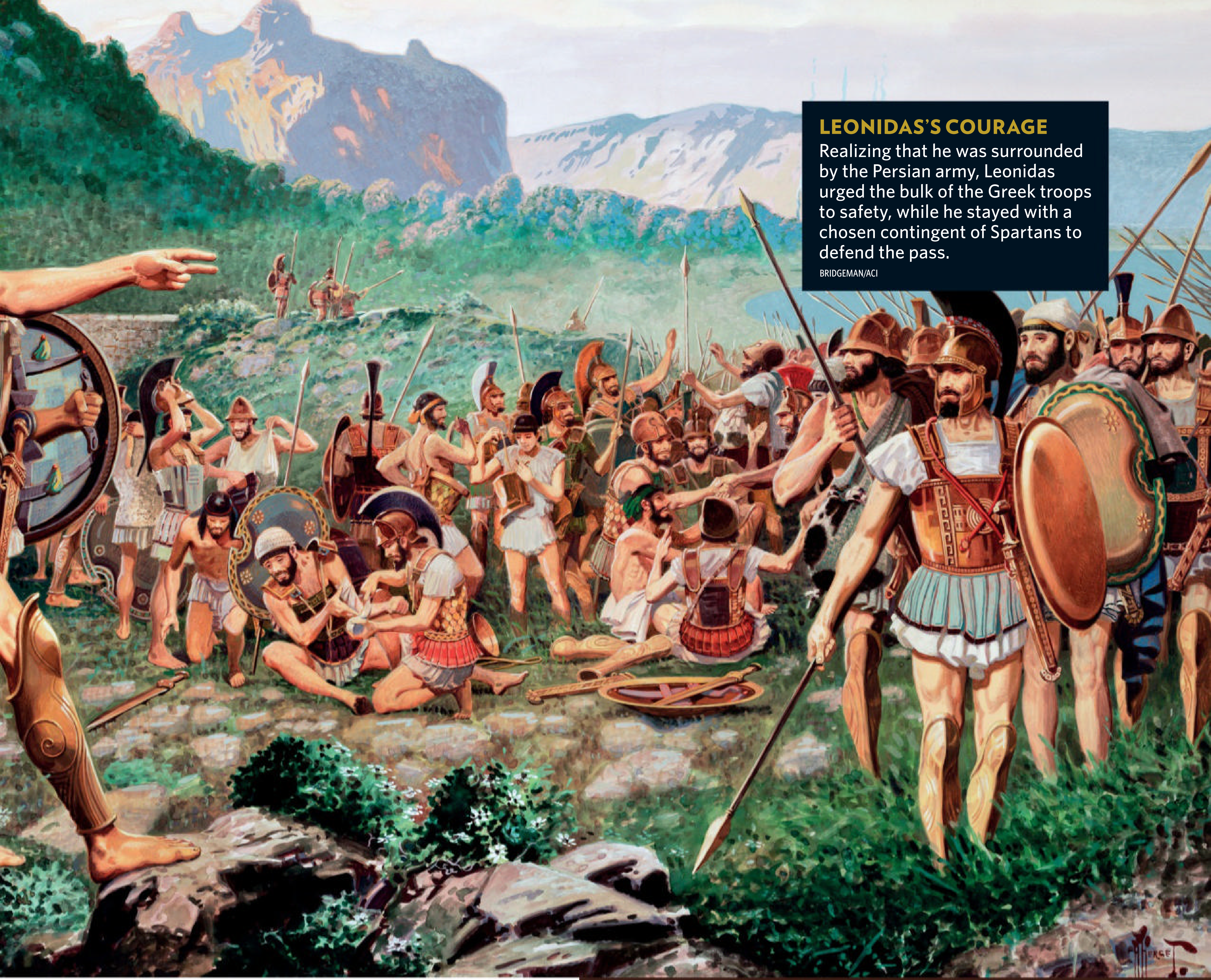
Betrayed!

The Greeks pushed back Xerxes' men time after time, and Persian casualties mounted. Before the first day was over, Xerxes had assembled his best troops—an elite group of 10,000 men under the command of the Persian nobleman Hydarnes. The Greeks dubbed them "the Immortals" because they seemed able to replace casualties immediately, so their ranks were never depleted. But even they couldn't subdue

At first, not even the Immortals, the Persian elite corps, could subdue the Spartan-led Greek army at the Battle of Thermopylae.

PERSIAN ARCHER, FRIEZE FROM THE PALACE OF DARIUS AT SUSA. LOUVRE MUSEUM, PARIS

AURIMAGES



LEONIDAS'S COURAGE
Realizing that he was surrounded by the Persian army, Leonidas urged the bulk of the Greek troops to safety, while he stayed with a chosen contingent of Spartans to defend the pass.

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

the Greeks and were soon forced to retreat. Xerxes, watching the battle from a golden throne in the foothills nearby, is said to have jumped from his seat on several occasions, filled with rage at his troops' failure.

The next day the Persians attacked and were again unsuccessful. That is when a local Greek shepherd named Ephialtes (whose name has since become synonymous with treachery) handed them the secret to victory. Ephialtes told Xerxes about the Anopaia path, which led around the mountain ridge and ended behind the Greek positions, beside the eastern end of the pass. In exchange for a handsome reward, he promised to show the Persian soldiers the way. According to Herodotus, Xerxes entrusted the advance to Hydarnes and his Immortals, who set out from

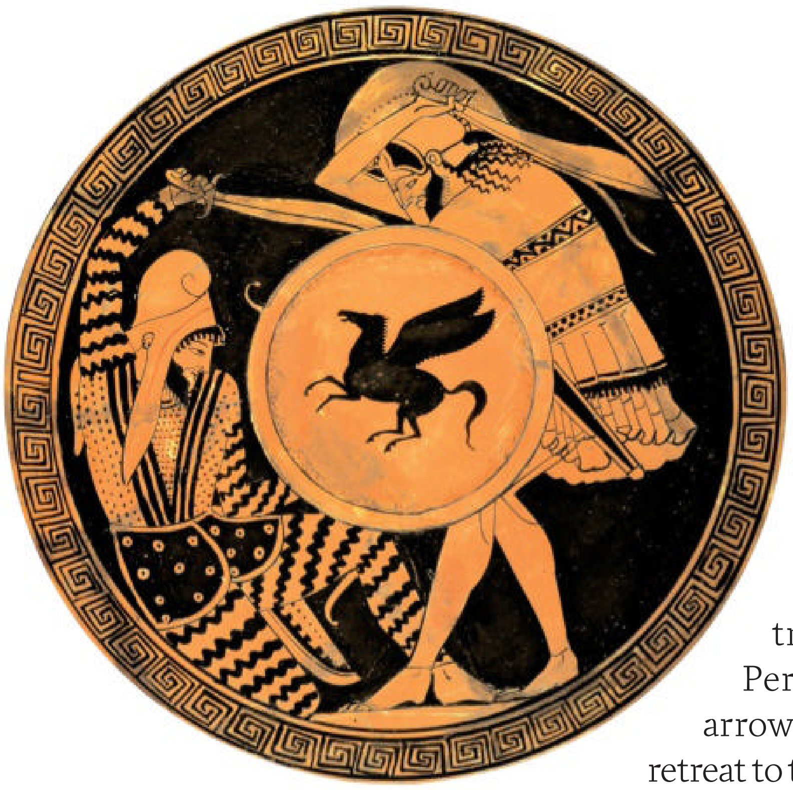
LIFE AMONG THE SPARTANS

THE DOMINANT LAND POWER in ancient Greece was known as Lacedaemon in antiquity, but it is better known today as Sparta. Its dedication to military service and discipline gave it a strong advantage over other Greek civilizations—including its chief rival, the philosophical hotbed of Athens—during the fifth century B.C. Unlike Athens, Sparta was famed for its austerity—for its "spartan" character. The Spartans had little interest in intellectual and artistic pursuits (other than patriotic poetry) and were legendary for their intense physical and mental stamina, and their absolute dedication to defending their land. Little remains of their ancient capital of the Laconia region, situated on the Peloponnesus in modern Greece, but the impact of their culture lives on.

BETWEEN STONE AND SEA

When this memorial to Leonidas was erected at Thermopylae in 1955, the landscape had changed greatly since the battle in 480 B.C. when the Kallidromo massif formed the southern wall of the narrow Thermopylae Pass, and the northern boundary was the Aegean Sea. Over the centuries, silt brought downstream by rivers has shifted the coastline farther north.

JAMES T CARNEHAN/AGE FOTOSTOCK



CLASH OF EMPIRES

On this ceramic plate from the fifth century B.C., a Greek with a shield bearing the image of Pegasus defeats a Persian warrior.

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

the Persian camp "about the hour when lamps are lit" and marched all night up the trail.

Dawn was breaking the next day when they reached the highest point and came upon the Greek troops standing guard. The Persians attacked with their arrows and forced the Greeks to retreat to the steepest peaks. Hydarnes didn't bother to pursue them. Wasting no time, he continued his advance along the Anopaia path.

When Leonidas learned that the Persians had his forces surrounded, he called a council of war. Should the Greeks retreat or stand their ground? Despite the impossibility of their position, Leonidas was firm in his decision: His 300 Spartans, along with a band of Thebans, would stay and fight. His sense of honor and strict military discipline made surrender unthinkable. For a Spartan like Leonidas, there were only two options: win or die. Herodotus adds another detail to the decision: The Oracle of Delphi had foretold that either Sparta would be destroyed by the Persians or its king would die. Knowing this, Leonidas may have believed that his sacrifice would save his city-state.

Death of a Leader, Birth of a Legend

Leonidas ordered the Greek fleet in the strait of Artemisium to abandon its position and ordered most of the men fighting with him on land to leave the battlefield. Those who remained ate to gather strength. According to Diodorus Siculus, Leonidas said, with grim humor, "Have a hearty breakfast, for tonight we dine in Hades!" Ephorus and Diodorus Siculus recount how Leonidas then made an audacious, early assault on the Persian camp. Herodotus's account, however, describes a Persian offensive. Xerxes didn't rush to attack as Hydarnes needed time to complete his preparations. The general poured out libations to the rising sun, which was revered by the Persians, and then waited until mid-morning to launch the Persian assault.

Leonidas left the protection of the narrow gorge and took up position in an open area. While dangerously exposed, he was better placed to deploy his men and kill the greatest number of enemies. The Greeks, knowing that death was the only possible outcome, fought in a heedless frenzy. When their spears were broken, they drew their swords and continued to fight.

Finally Leonidas fell. A skirmish broke out around him. The Spartans attacked the Persians and managed to hold them at bay and recover the body of their king. When the defenders saw that Hydarnes had arrived with the Immortals, they fell back and regrouped on higher ground behind the protective wall. Those who still had swords defended themselves; others fought with "fists and teeth." The Persians eventually broke down the wall and surrounded them, but avoided hand-to-hand fighting. Instead, they finished off their enemies with arrows.

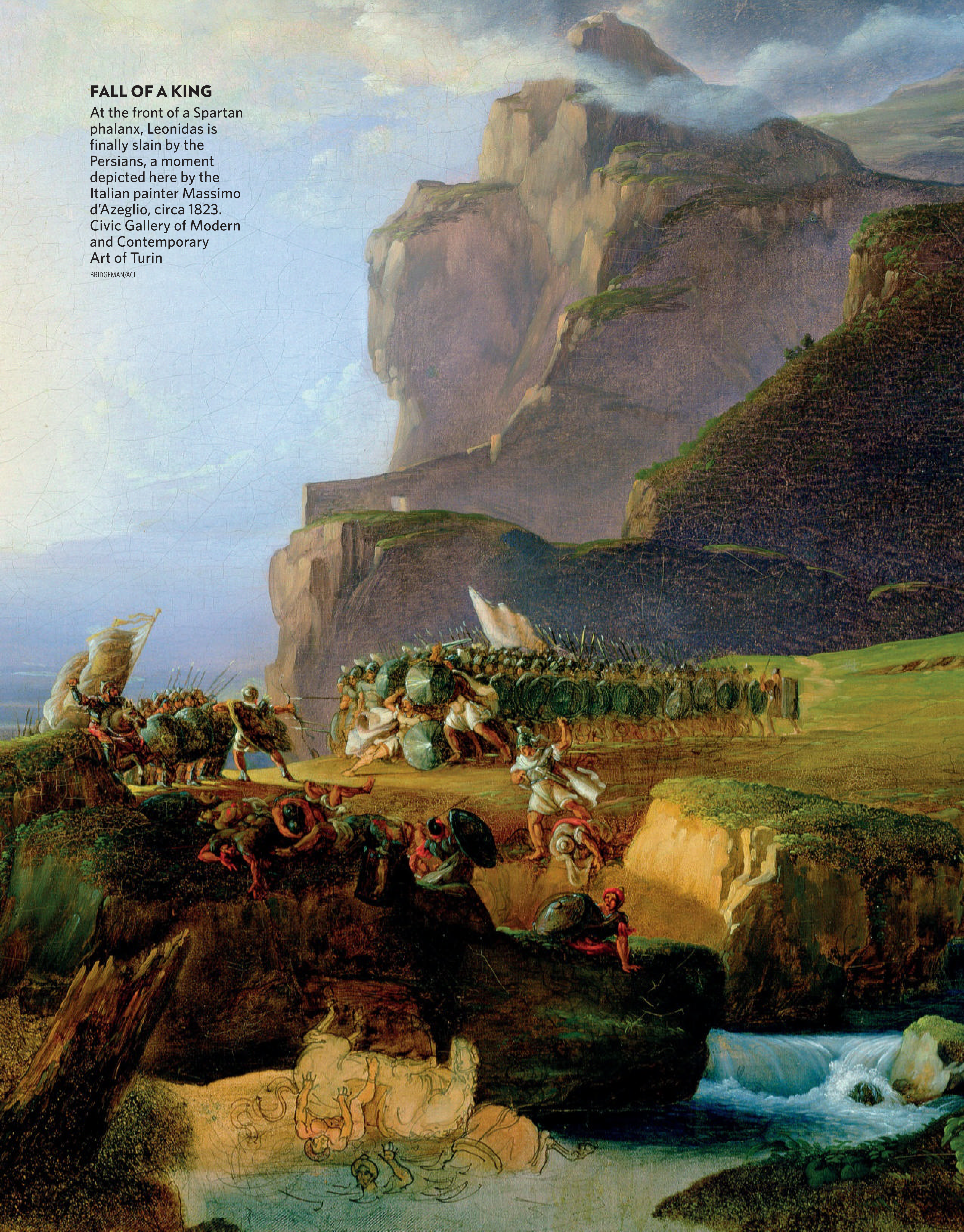
By order of Xerxes, the Theban Greeks who had survived were branded on their foreheads, marked as slaves. Herodotus recounts that Leonidas's head was cut off, and his body impaled. He was buried in Thermopylae, along with the other soldiers. A stone funerary monument in the shape of a lion was later erected, and the poet Simonides wrote a simple epitaph to all the fallen: "Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by / That here obedient to their words we lie."

In 440 B.C. the bones of Leonidas were transferred to Sparta. His tomb there can be seen near the modern city of Sparta today. After Thermopylae, the Greeks went on to achieve great victories at Salamis and Plataea where they decisively defeated the Persians. Leonidas and his men had reinforced the prestige of Sparta and raised the morale of all Greeks to continue fighting against Persia. As Diodorus Siculus wrote: "These men, therefore, alone of all of whom history records, have in defeat been accorded a greater fame than all others who have won the fairest victories." ■

A SPECIALIST IN CLASSICAL PHILOLOGY, **JAVIER MURCIA** IS AUTHOR OF A RECENT BOOK ON SPARTA.

Learn more

Thermopylae: The Battle That Changed the World
Paul Cartledge. Abrams Press, 2006.



FALL OF A KING

At the front of a Spartan phalanx, Leonidas is finally slain by the Persians, a moment depicted here by the Italian painter Massimo d'Azeglio, circa 1823. Civic Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art of Turin

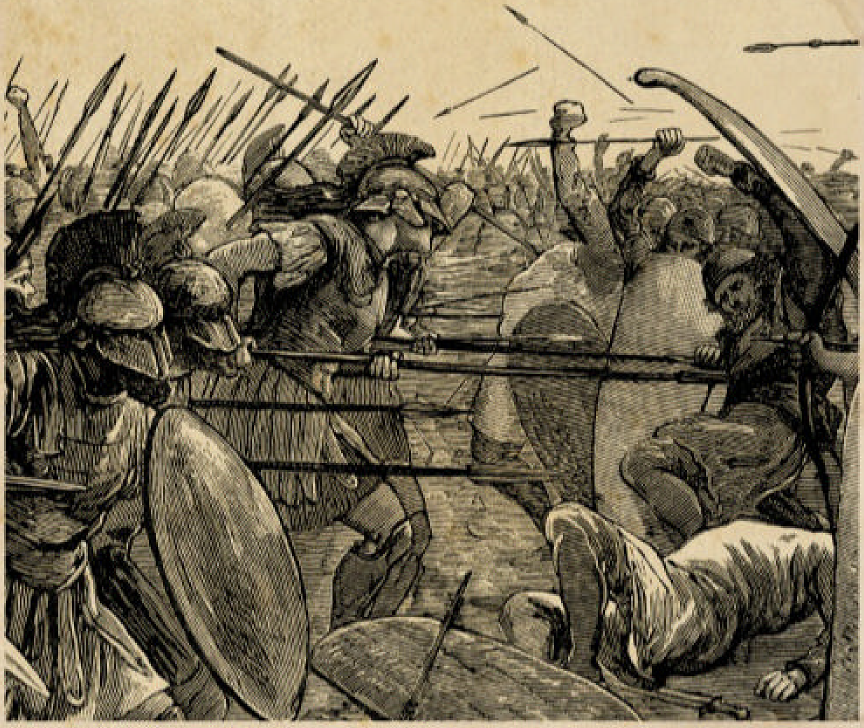
BRIDGEMAN/ACI

NEVER SURRENDER

AT THERMOPYLAE, King Leonidas authorized two Spartan soldiers to withdraw from combat because of illness. Eurytus, decided to stay, and was killed in battle. The other, Aristodemus, went home, but when he reached Sparta, he was shunned, marginalized, and deprived of his civic rights. According to Herodotus, "no Spartan would give him fire, nor speak with him; and they called him for disgrace, Aristodemus the coward."

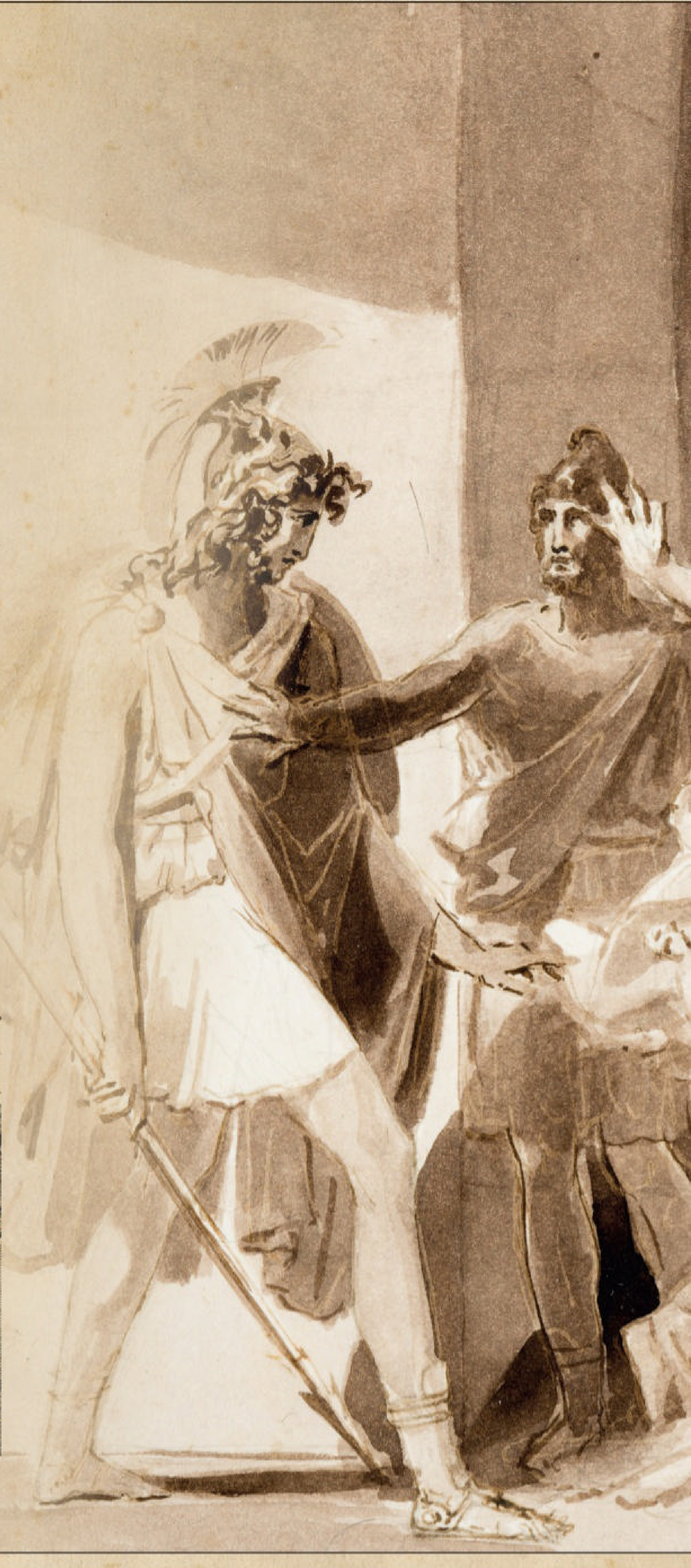
XENOPHON writing in the early fourth century B.C., described how perceived cowards in Sparta were not allowed to share a table, were excluded from games at the gym, and were ignored during choric dances. A coward would have to give up his seat even to a younger man, and no woman would marry him. "[I] am not surprised if in Sparta they deem death preferable to a life so steeped in dishonor and reproach."

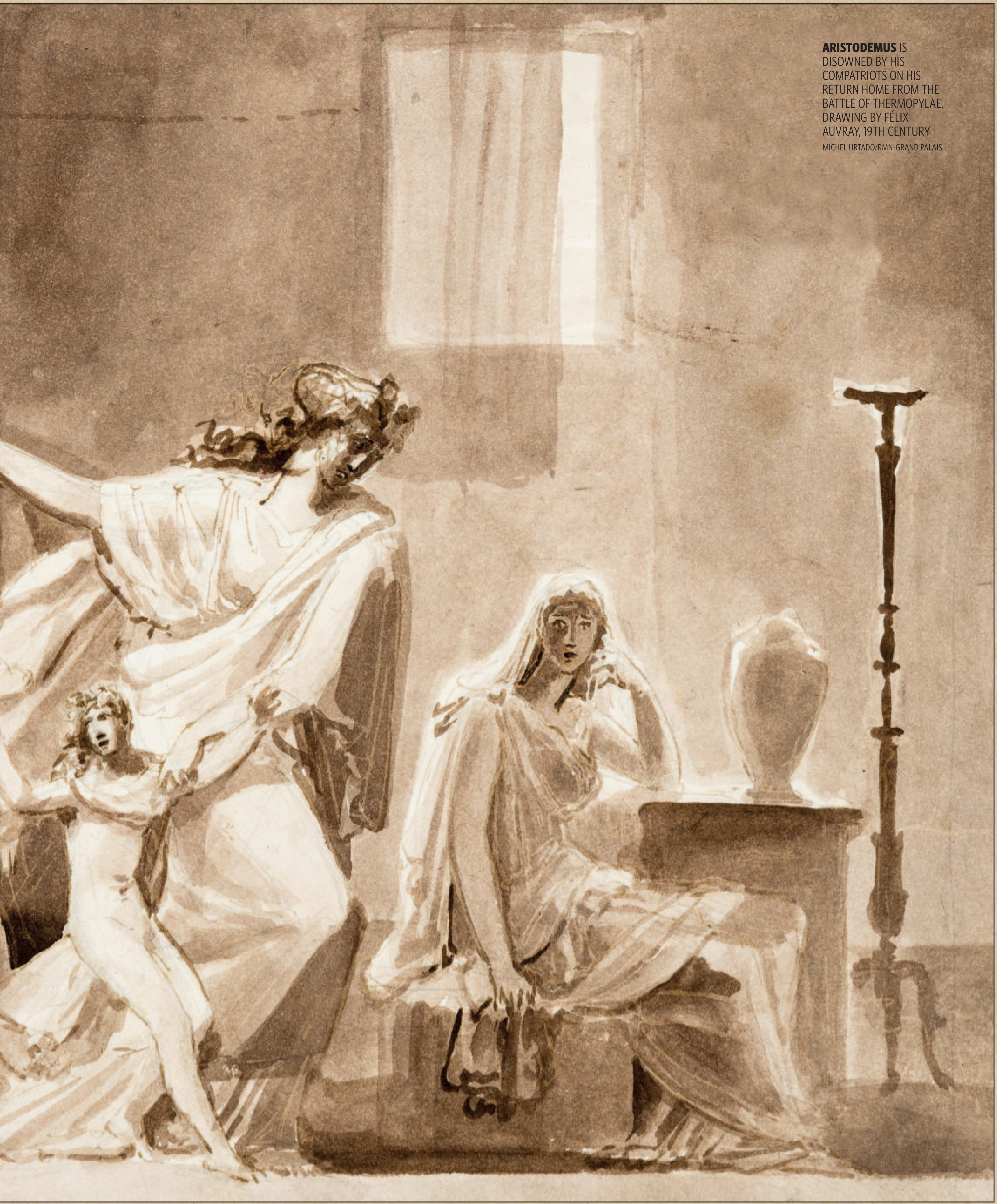
ARISTODEMUS'S torment did not last long. The following year he returned to fight the Persians, this time at the Battle of Plataea. He battled furiously, keen to make up for his "shameful" shortcomings at Thermopylae. "He plainly wished to die," Herodotus wrote, "and so pressed forward in frenzy from his post." Aristodemus finally died in battle in an effort to redeem himself.



SPARTANS AT THE BATTLE OF PLATAEA. ILLUSTRATION BY EDWARD OLLIER FOR *CASSELL'S ILLUSTRATED UNIVERSAL HISTORY,* 1890

LOOK AND LEARN/BRIDGEMAN/ACI





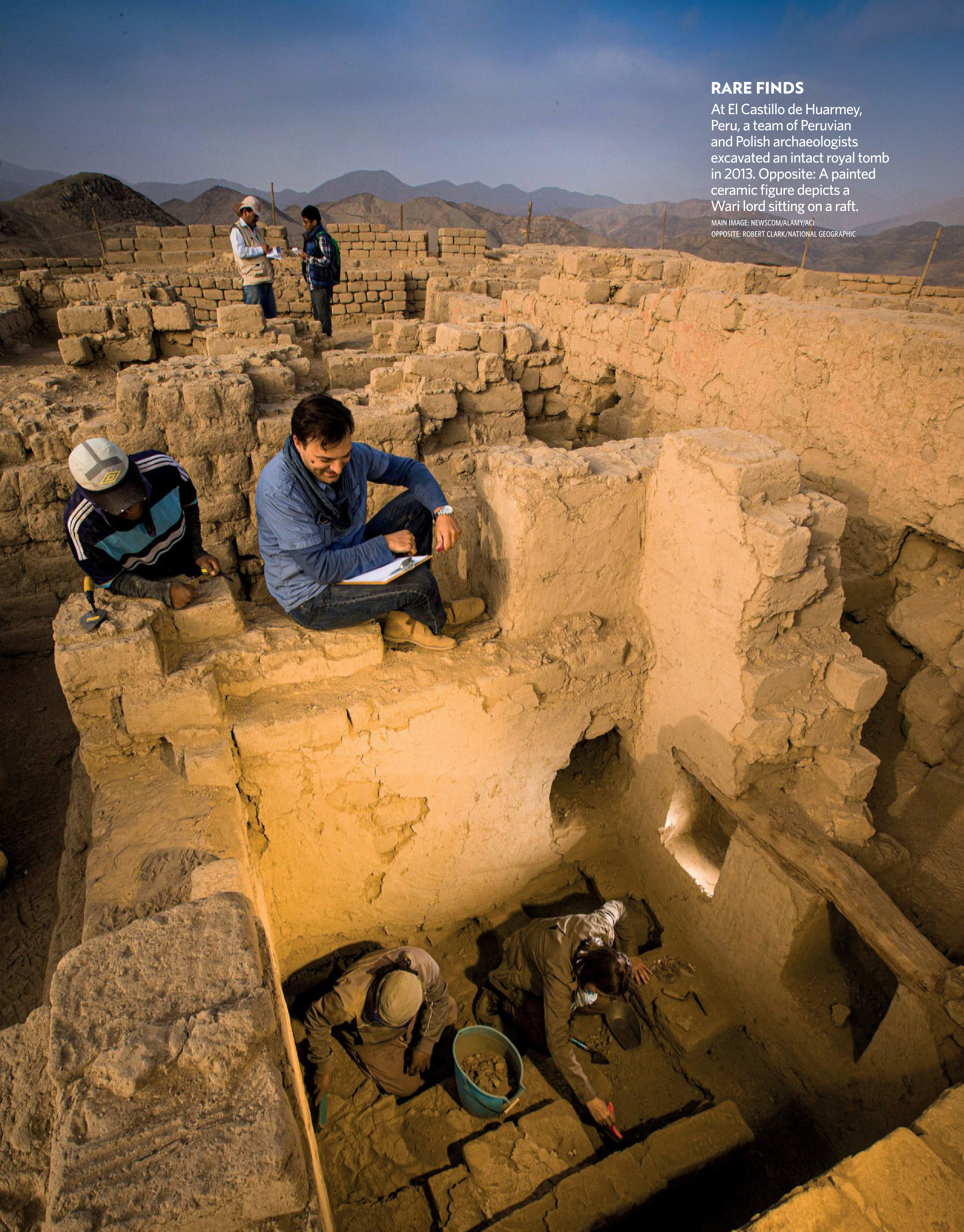
ARISTODEMUS IS DISOWNED BY HIS COMPATRIOTS ON HIS RETURN HOME FROM THE BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE. DRAWING BY FÉLIX AUVRAY, 19TH CENTURY

MICHEL URTADO/RMN-GRAND PALAIS

TREASURES OF THE WARI

Between A.D. 700 and 1000, the Wari ruled the coastal highlands of modern-day Peru. Many of their royal tombs had been looted over the centuries, but one intact tomb was found. Holding the body of a queen, the grave at El Castillo de Huarmey revealed the rich culture of the Wari people.

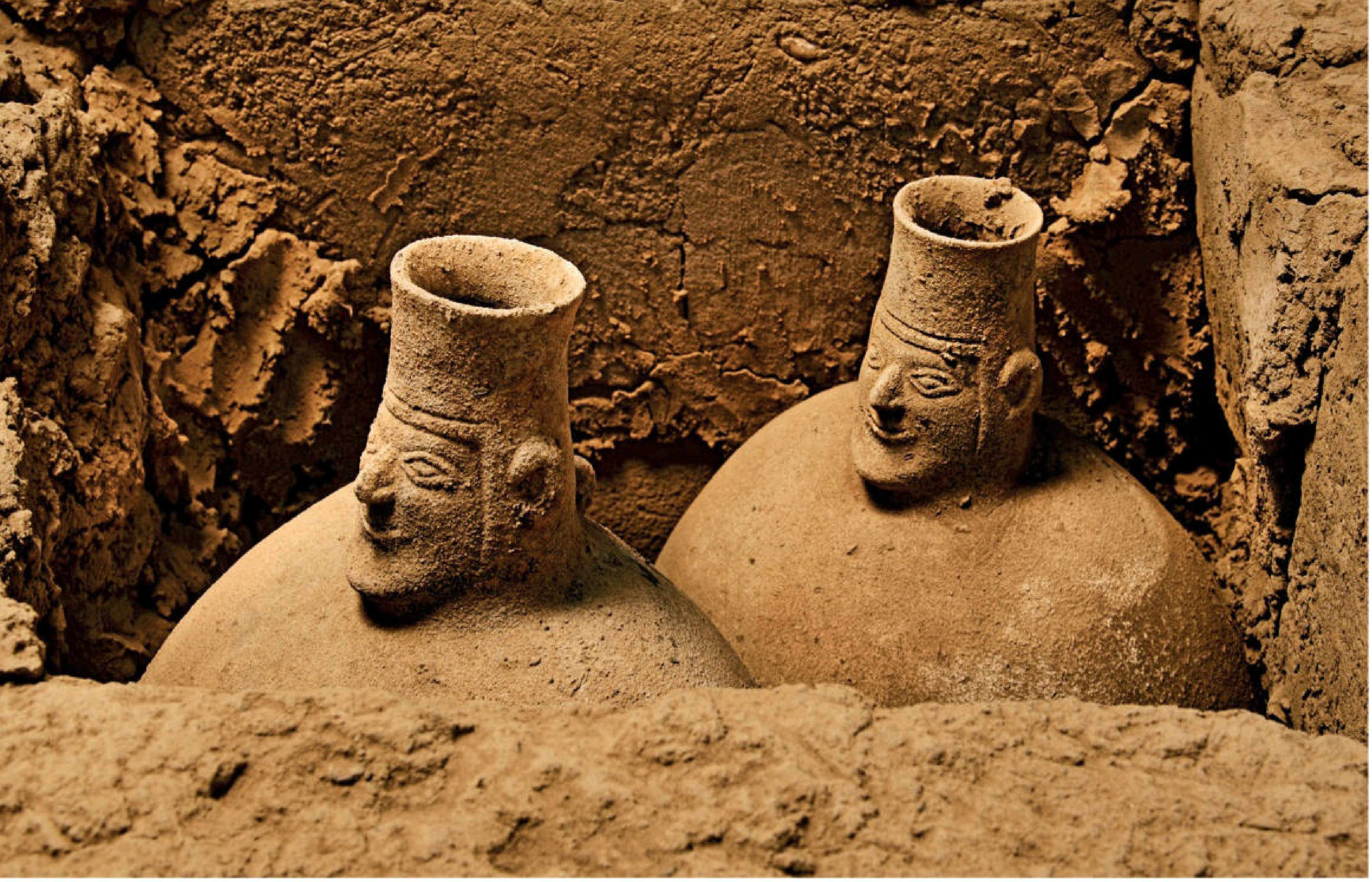
EDITORS OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



RARE FINDS

At El Castillo de Huarmey, Peru, a team of Peruvian and Polish archaeologists excavated an intact royal tomb in 2013. Opposite: A painted ceramic figure depicts a Wari lord sitting on a raft.

MAIN IMAGE: NEWSCOM/ALAMY/ACI
OPPOSITE: ROBERT CLARK/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



PAIR OF SMILES

Two ceramic jars, adorned with smiling faces (above), were among more than a thousand artifacts recovered from the tomb at El Castillo.

ROBERT CLARK/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

More than a thousand years ago in what is now Peru, the site of El Castillo de Huarmey was among the land's most sacred places; University of Warsaw archaeologist Miłosz Giersz was sure of it. Plenty of people had warned Giersz that excavating there would be difficult and almost certainly a waste of time and money. Looters had already been tunneling into the massive hill, searching for ancient tombs and treasure. Located on the coast, a four-hour drive north of Lima, what was once a holy place was pitted with holes, looking more like a moonscape littered with ancient human bones, and strewn with modern trash.

Looking past the debris, Giersz was entranced by the bits of textiles and broken pottery he saw dotting the slopes. They came from Peru's little-known Wari civilization, whose heartland lay far to the south. In 2010 Giersz and a small research team began investigating by imaging what lay underground with a magnetometer and taking aerial photos from a camera sailing above on a kite. The results revealed something that generations of grave robbers had missed: the faint outlines of buried walls running along a rocky southern spur.

Working with Peruvian archaeologist Roberto Pimentel Nita, Giersz and his team dug there, and the faint outline turned out to be a massive maze of towers and high walls spread over the

FOUR-CORNERED HAT, WARI TEXTILES, SEVENTH TO NINTH CENTURY. THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART/ART RESOURCE/SCALA, FLORENCE

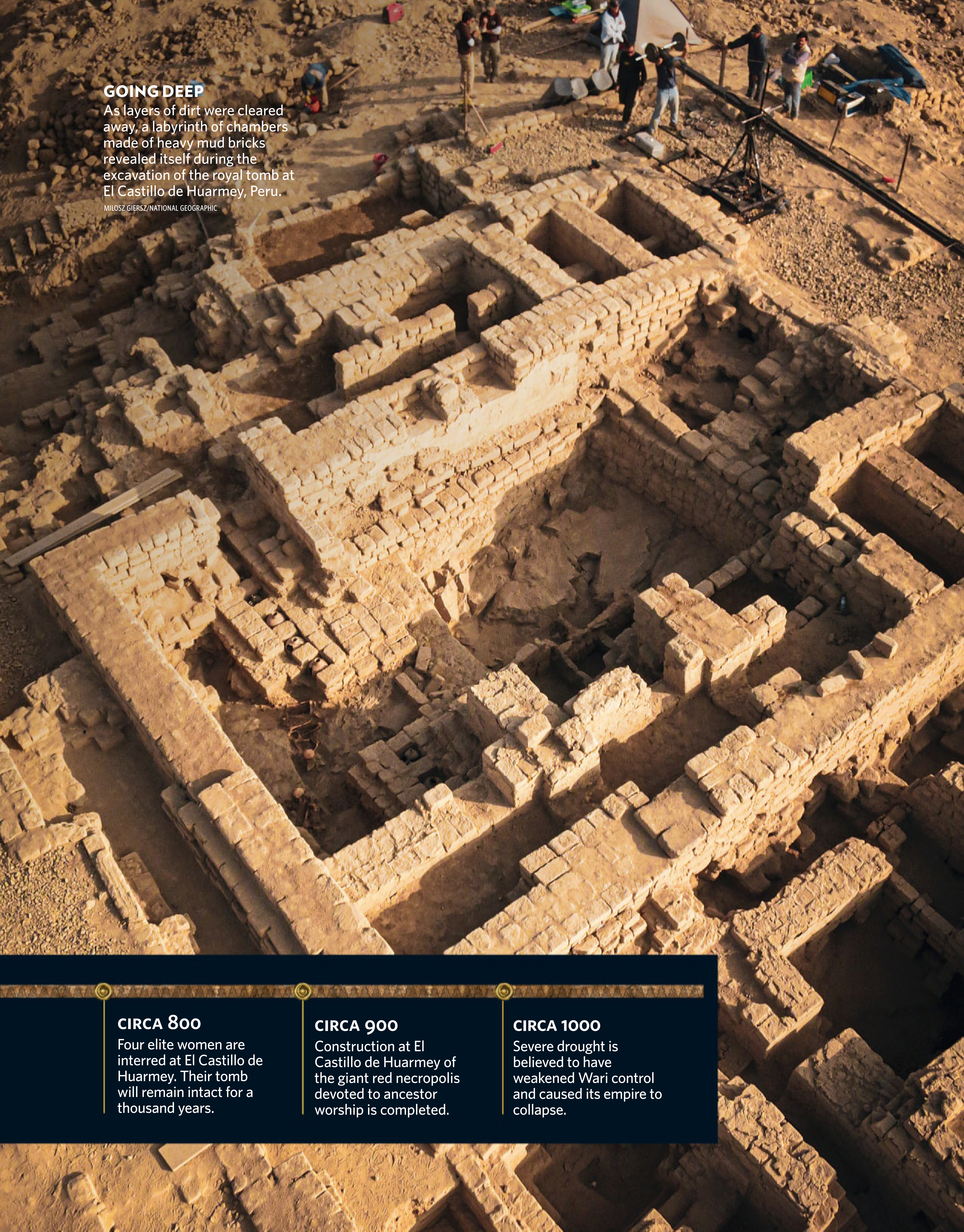
THE WARI EMPIRE

CIRCA 600

Wari culture emerges from the rugged terrain of the Ayacucho Valley in western South America.

CIRCA 700

The Wari become the dominant power in the region. They establish and govern large settlements.



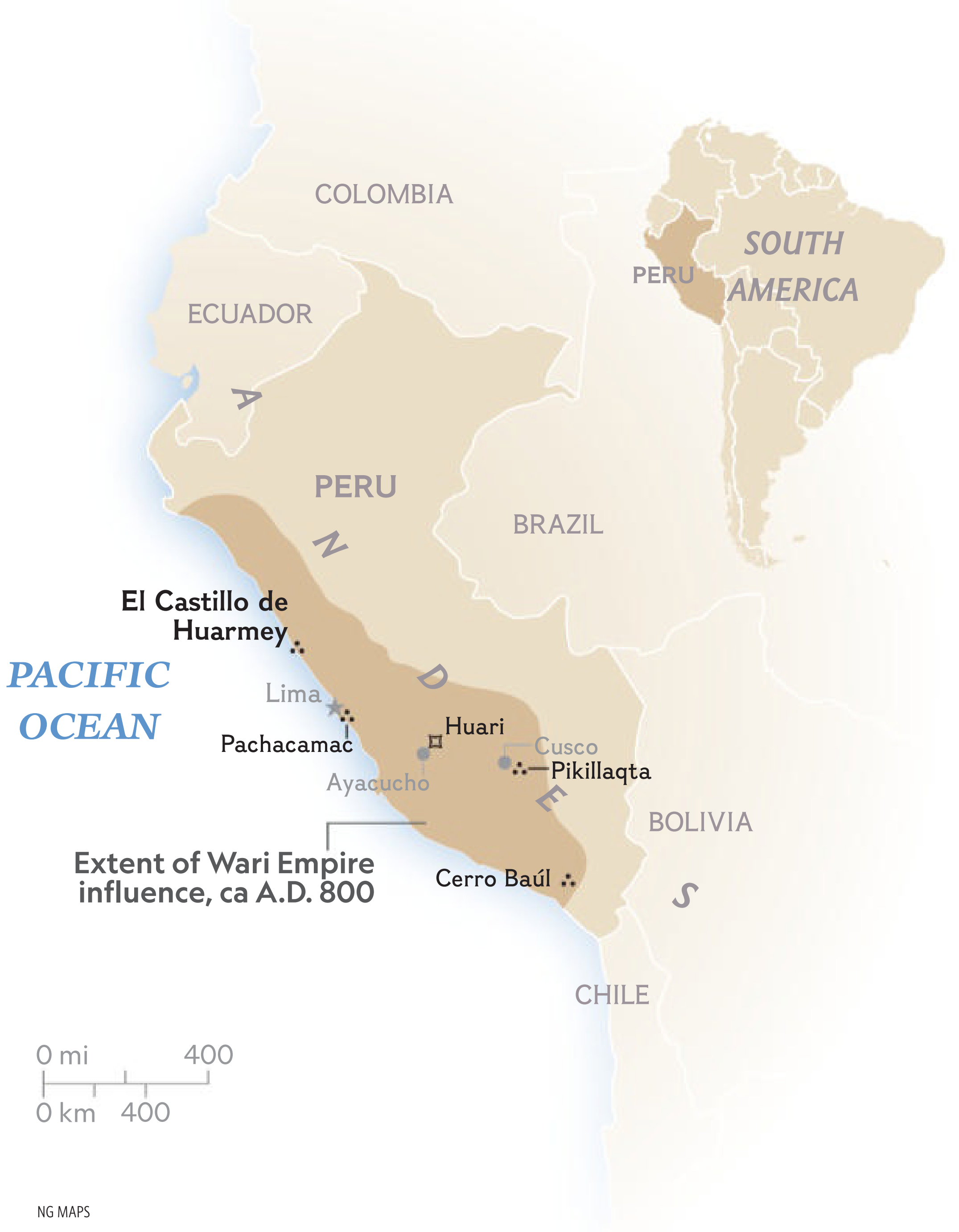
GOING DEEP
As layers of dirt were cleared away, a labyrinth of chambers made of heavy mud bricks revealed itself during the excavation of the royal tomb at El Castillo de Huarmey, Peru.

MILOSZ GIERSZ/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

CIRCA 800
Four elite women are interred at El Castillo de Huarmey. Their tomb will remain intact for a thousand years.

CIRCA 900
Construction at El Castillo de Huarmey of the giant red necropolis devoted to ancestor worship is completed.

CIRCA 1000
Severe drought is believed to have weakened Wari control and caused its empire to collapse.



Expansion and Influence

WARI CULTURE emerged around A.D. 600 from the Ayacucho Valley of Peru. From their capital Huari in the Andes, the Wari expanded control across the region until about A.D. 1000, when their empire collapsed. The Wari did not have a written language, so much of what is understood about them today comes from archaeological sites. One of the best preserved is Pikillaqta, located about 12 miles east of modern Cusco, where a massive irrigation system and a fortified complex were built. Another important Wari site in southern Peru is Cerro Baúl, which served as both an administrative and ceremonial center. Just south of modern Lima are the remains of a major religious center, Pachacamac (scholars debate whether it was independent or a Wari province, but artifacts found there reveal strong Wari influence).

FIERCE SUBJECTS

Animals were popular subjects of Wari artisans, who sculpted vessels with their likenesses out of stone (below) and from clay.

ROBERT CLARK/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

entire southern end of the site. Once painted crimson, the sprawling complex seemed to be a Wari temple dedicated to ancestor worship.

In fall 2012, as the team dug down beneath a layer of heavy trapezoidal bricks, they discovered something few Andean archaeologists ever expected to find: an unlooted royal tomb. Inside were interred four elite Wari women—perhaps queens or princesses—accompanied by as many as 54 other highborn individuals, six human sacrifices, and more than a thousand grave goods, all of the finest workmanship—from huge golden ear ornaments, silver bowls, and copper-alloy axes to exquisitely crafted textiles and colorful ceramics.

The Wari

Around the seventh century A.D., the Wari emerged from obscurity in Peru's Ayacucho Valley, rising to glory long before the Inca, in a time of repeated drought and environmental crisis. They became master engineers, constructing aqueducts and canal systems to irrigate their terraced fields.

Near the modern city of Ayacucho, they founded a sprawling capital, known today as Huari. At its zenith, Huari boasted a population of as many as 40,000 people—twice the population of Paris at the time. From this stronghold the Wari lords were able to extend their domain hundreds of miles along the Andes and into the coastal deserts, forging what many archaeologists call the first empire in Andean South America, which would grow to cover nearly the entire Peruvian Andes and coast.

Researchers have long puzzled over how the Wari built and governed this vast, unruly realm, whether through conquest or persuasion or some combination of both. Unlike most imperial powers, the Wari had no system of writing and left no recorded narrative history, but the rich finds at El Castillo, a journey of some 500 miles from the Wari capital, are filling in many blanks.

After the Wari had established firm control of the region, the new lord constructed a palace at the foot of El Castillo, and over time he and his successors began transforming the steep hill above into a towering temple devoted to ancestor worship. To rub shoulders in death with members of the royal dynasty, nobles staked

EXPANSION OF AN EMPIRE

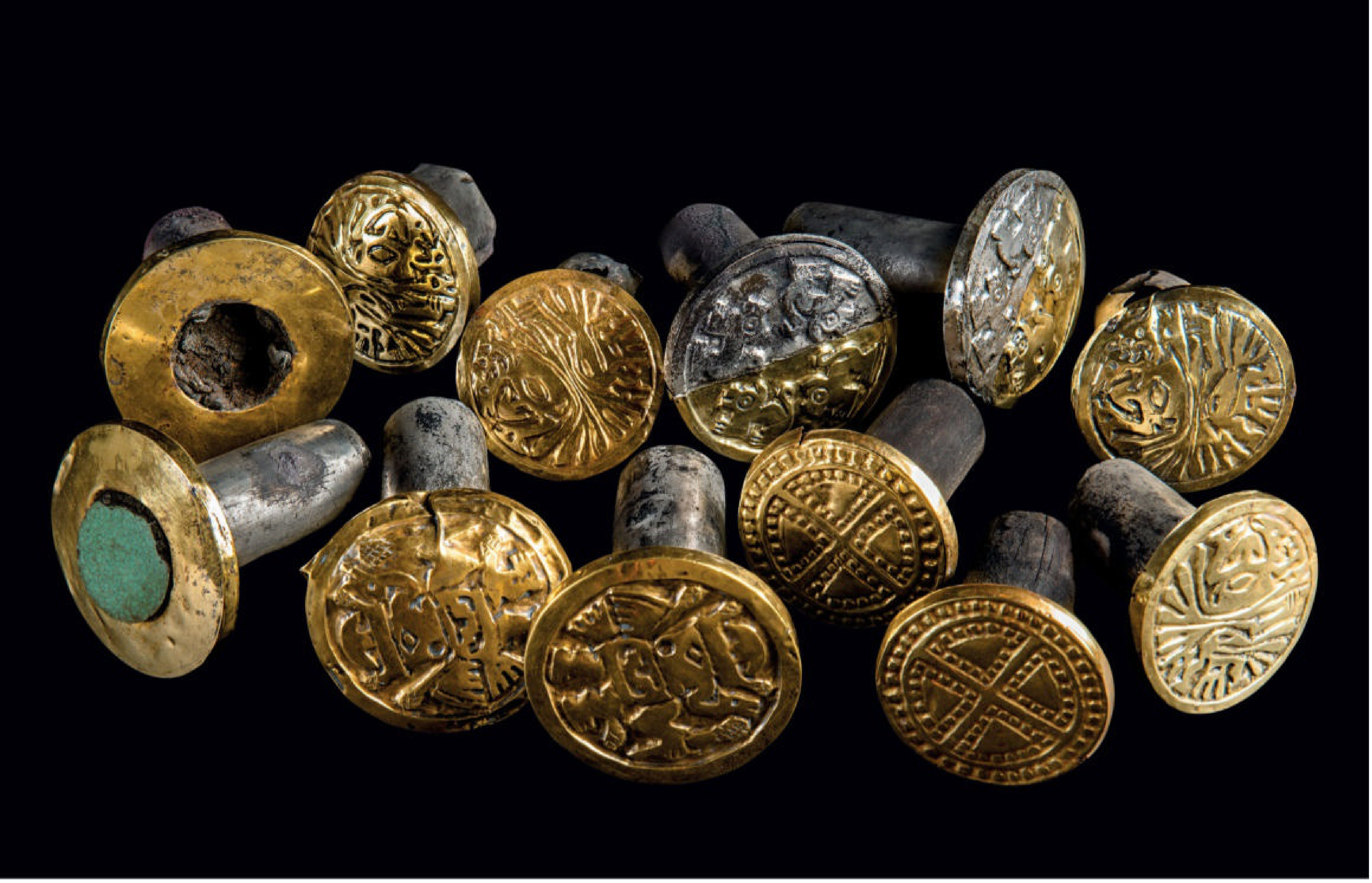
Pikillaqta was one of the largest and most impressive settlements in the Wari empire. Excavations revealed an enormous complex, with more than 700 buildings.

MARK GREEN/ALAMY

BIRTHPLACE OF THE WARI

The rugged mountains and valleys of the Ayacucho region, located some 9,000 feet above sea level, was where Wari culture emerged about 1,400 years ago.

BERT DE RUITER/ALAMY/AGE FOTOSTOCK



IMPRESSIVE ADORNMENTS

Elite Wari women wore gold and silver ear ornaments—some as big as doorknobs—like the ones (above) found in the royal tomb at El Castillo.

ROBERT CLARK/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

out places on the summit for mausoleums of their own. When they had exhausted the available space there, they engineered more, building stepped terraces all the way down the slopes of El Castillo and filling them with funerary towers and graves.

So important was El Castillo to the Wari nobles, Giersz explained, that they "used every possible local worker." Dried mortar in many of the newly excavated walls bears human handprints, some left by children as young as 11 years old. When the construction ended, likely sometime between A.D. 900 and 1000, an immense crimson necropolis loomed over the valley. Though inhabited by the dead, El Castillo conveyed a powerful political message to the living: The Wari invaders were now the rightful rulers. "If you want to take possession of the land," archaeologist Krzysztof Makowski said, "you have to show that your ancestors are inscribed on the landscape. That's part of Andean logic."

WARI SPOON, CARVED WOOD, ROYAL TOMB, EL CASTILLO DE HUARMEY, PERU

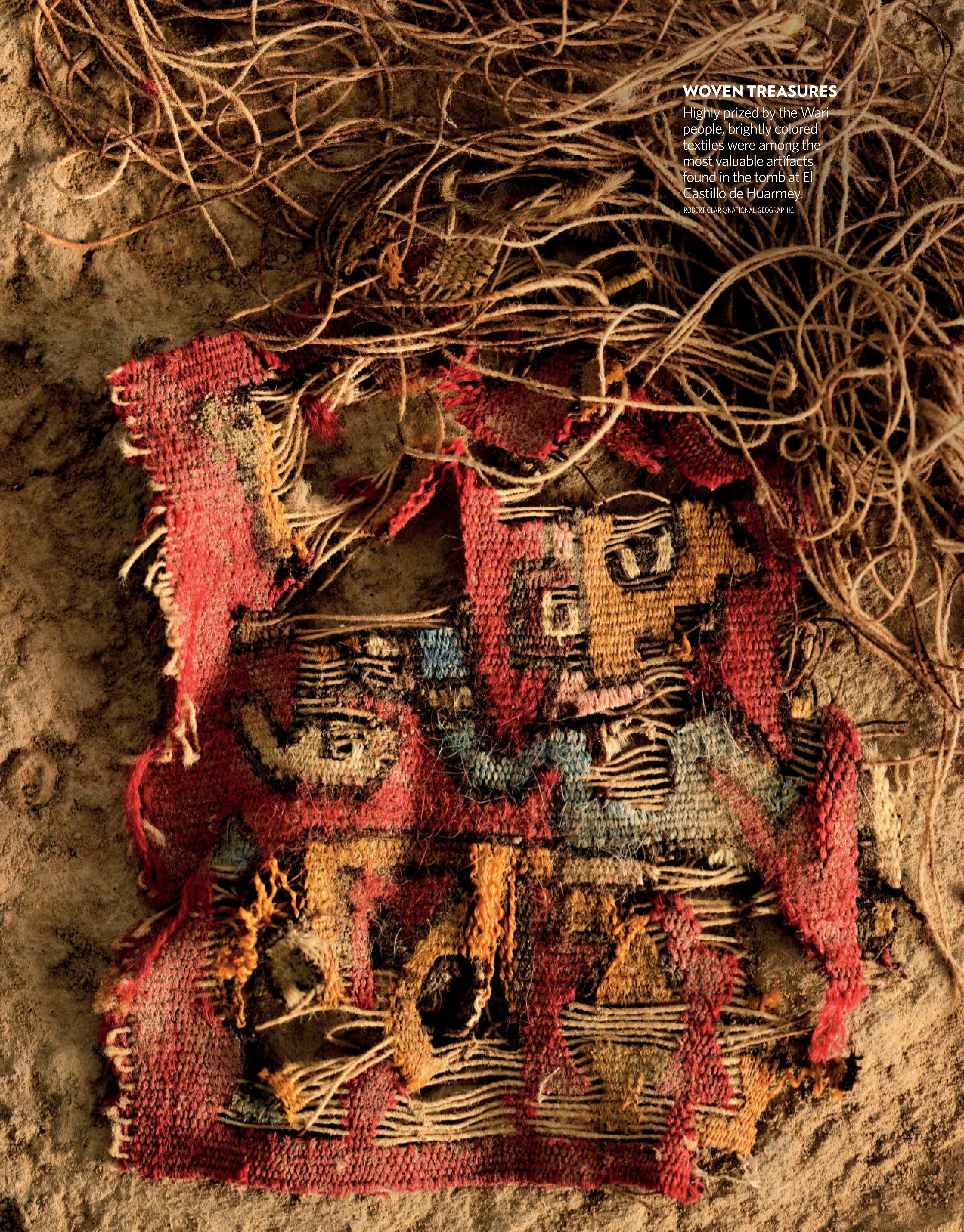
CRIS BOURONCLE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Tomb

The intact chamber uncovered in 2013 lay along the western slopes of the necropolis. Wari builders had carved out a subterranean chamber that became an imperial tomb. Almost all of the deceased buried inside the chamber were women and girls who had likely died over a period of months, most probably of natural causes. Four of them appeared to be of higher rank than the rest.

The Wari treated these four noblewomen in death with great respect. Attendants dressed them in richly woven tunics and shawls, painted their faces with a sacred red pigment, and adorned them with precious jewelry, from gold ear flares to delicate crystal-beaded necklaces. Their bodies were arranged in the flexed position favored by the Wari and then wrapped in a large cloth to form a funerary bundle.

Rich offerings were placed in small chambers, including textiles valued more highly than gold; knotted cords known as *khipus* (quipus), used for keeping track of imperial goods; and the body parts of the Andean condor, a bird closely associated with the aristocracy. (Indeed, one title of the Wari emperor may well have been Mallku, an Andean word meaning "condor.")



WOVEN TREASURES
Highly prized by the Wari people, brightly colored textiles were among the most valuable artifacts found in the tomb at El Castillo de Huarmey.

ROBERT CLARK/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

18+

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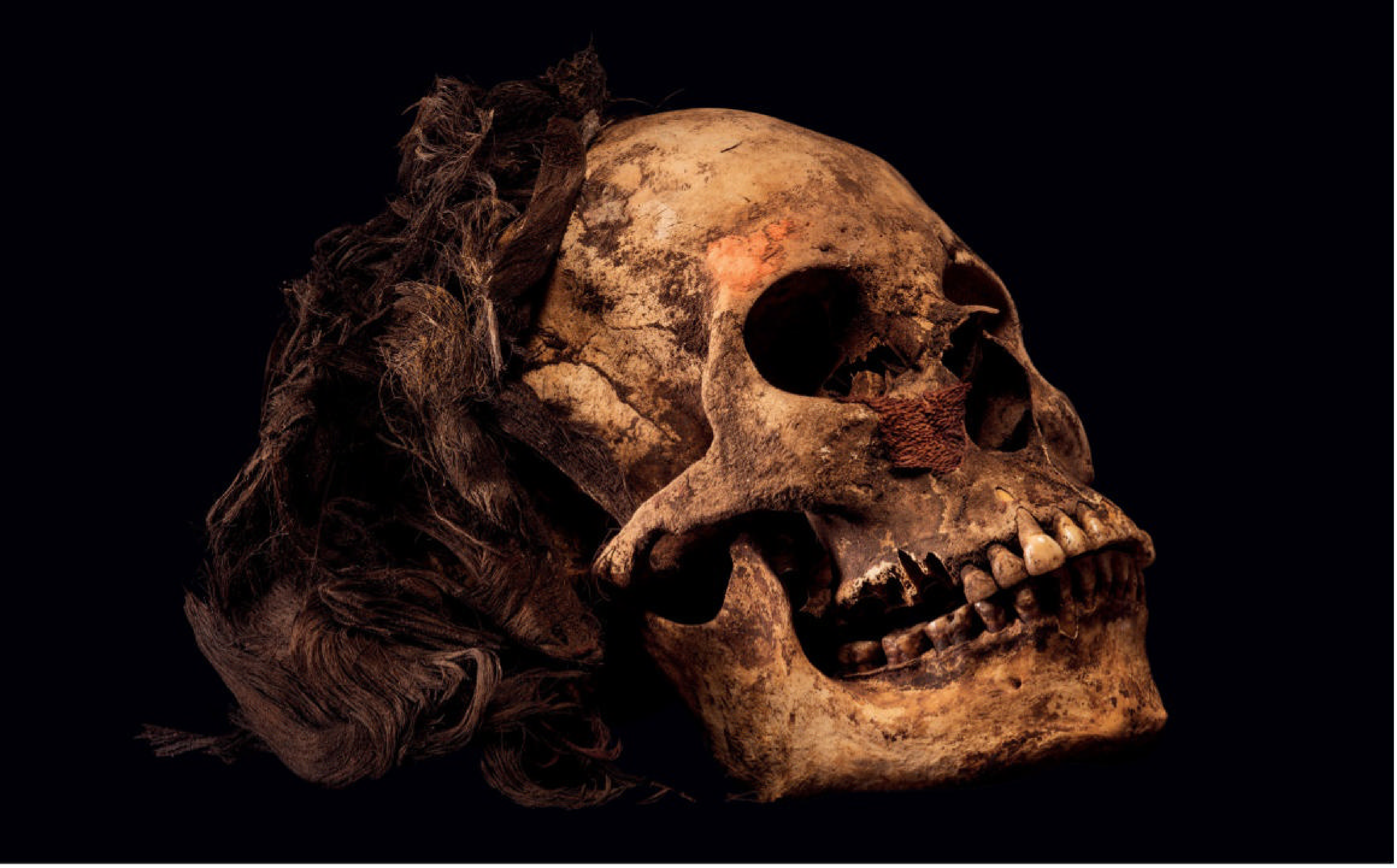


SIGNS OF MOURNING

Before her burial, the skull of the woman now known as the Huarmey Queen (above) was adorned by mourners with red pigment, still visible on the brow.

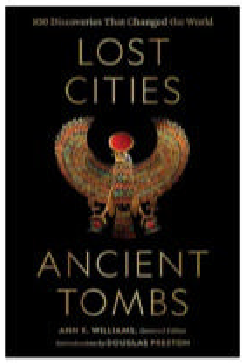
ROBERT CLARK/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Social rank appears to have mattered as much in death as it did in life. Attendants placed the highest ranked women in three private side chambers in the tomb. The most important, a woman of about 60, lay surrounded by rare luxuries, from multiple pairs of ear ornaments to a bronze ceremonial ax and a silver goblet. Perhaps most valuable were weaving tools fashioned from gold. Wari women were consummate weavers, producing tapestry-like cloth with yarn counts higher than those of the famous Flemish and Dutch weavers of the 16th century.

Nicknamed the Huarmey Queen, her remains revealed more details about an elite woman's life in Wari culture. Careful examination of her skeleton revealed that she spent most of her time sitting, though she used her upper body extensively—the skeletal calling cards of a life spent weaving. In addition, she was missing some of her teeth—consistent with the decay that comes with regularly drinking *chicha,* a sugary, corn-based alcoholic beverage that only the elite were allowed to drink.

Beyond, in a large common area, the lesser noblewomen were interred along the walls. Beside each one, with few exceptions, there was a container roughly the size and shape of a shoe box. Made of cut canes, it held weaving tools, the kind favored by the Wari to create textiles. All of the noblewomen buried at El Castillo were clearly dedicated to this art. When the tomb was ready for sealing, laborers poured in more than 30 tons of gravel and capped the chamber with a layer of heavy adobe bricks. This tomb would remain undisturbed for centuries, keeping Wari wealth, knowledge, and tradition intact.

Today, researchers remain uncertain about why the Wari empire collapsed. One of the leading theories is that a severe drought struck their region around A.D. 1000. When the end came, it was swift. At one Wari site dedicated to making ceramics, potters seem to have dropped their tools one day and left, perhaps driven out by some as yet unidentified invader. The Wari left a history-changing legacy, though. They had created something in the Andes that never completely vanished: the idea of an empire. Four hundred years later, building on their foundations, the Inca emerged to revive it. ■



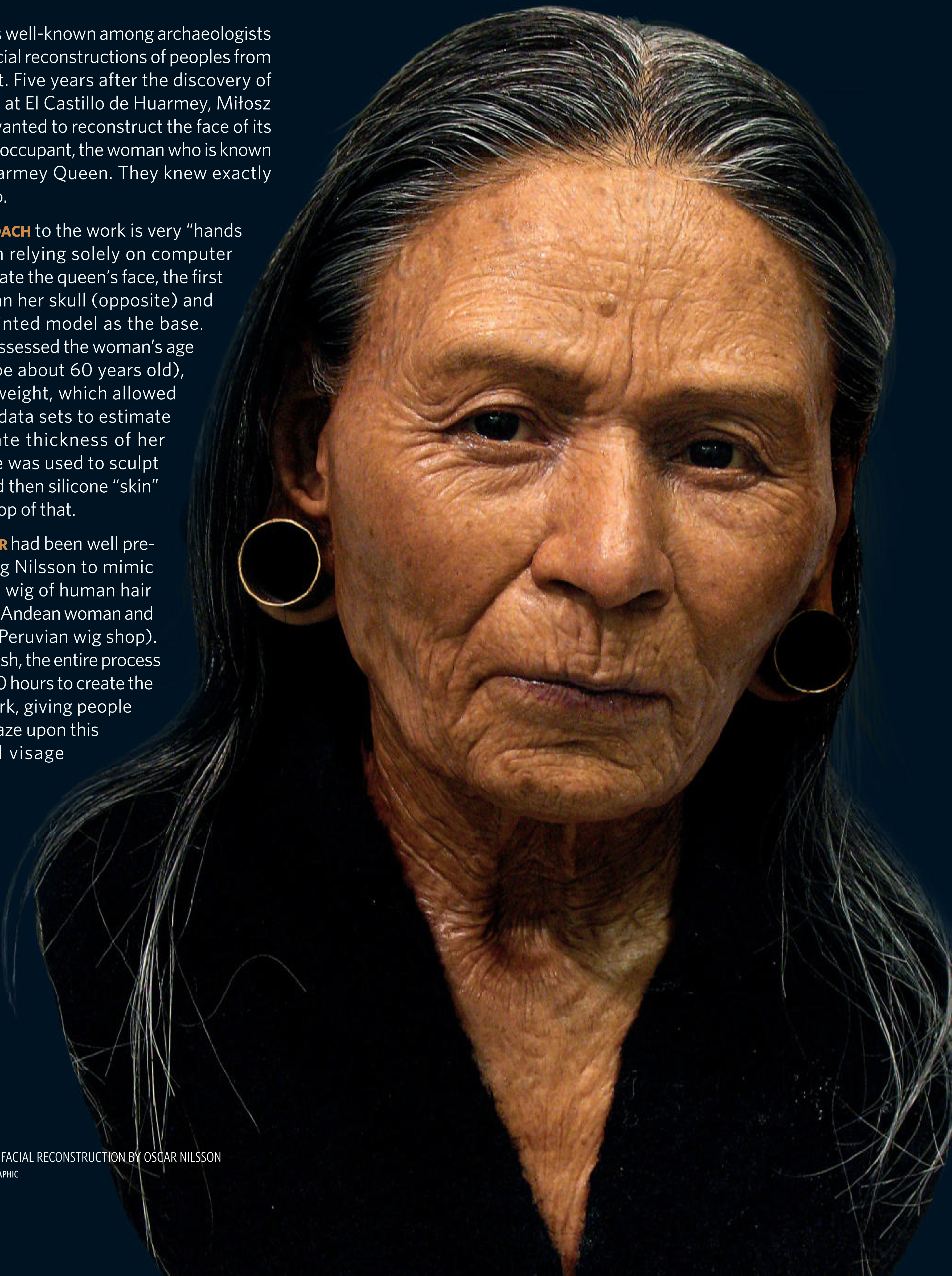
**Portions of this article appear in* Lost Cities, Ancient Tombs, *edited by A.R. Williams. Copyright © 2021 by National Geographic Partners. Reprinted by permission of National Geographic Partners.*

FACE FROM THE PAST

OSCAR NILSSON is well-known among archaeologists for his lifelike facial reconstructions of peoples from the distant past. Five years after the discovery of the intact tomb at El Castillo de Huarmey, Miłosz Giersz's team wanted to reconstruct the face of its most important occupant, the woman who is known now as the Huarmey Queen. They knew exactly whom to turn to.

NILSSON'S APPROACH to the work is very "hands on" rather than relying solely on computer scans. To re-create the queen's face, the first step was to scan her skull (opposite) and create a 3D printed model as the base. Scientists had assessed the woman's age (estimated to be about 60 years old), ethnicity, and weight, which allowed Nilsson to use data sets to estimate the approximate thickness of her flesh. Plasticine was used to sculpt her features and then silicone "skin" was placed on top of that.

THE QUEEN'S HAIR had been well preserved, allowing Nilsson to mimic her style with a wig of human hair (from an elderly Andean woman and purchased in a Peruvian wig shop). From start to finish, the entire process took Nilsson 220 hours to create the astonishing work, giving people the chance to gaze upon this woman's royal visage once more.

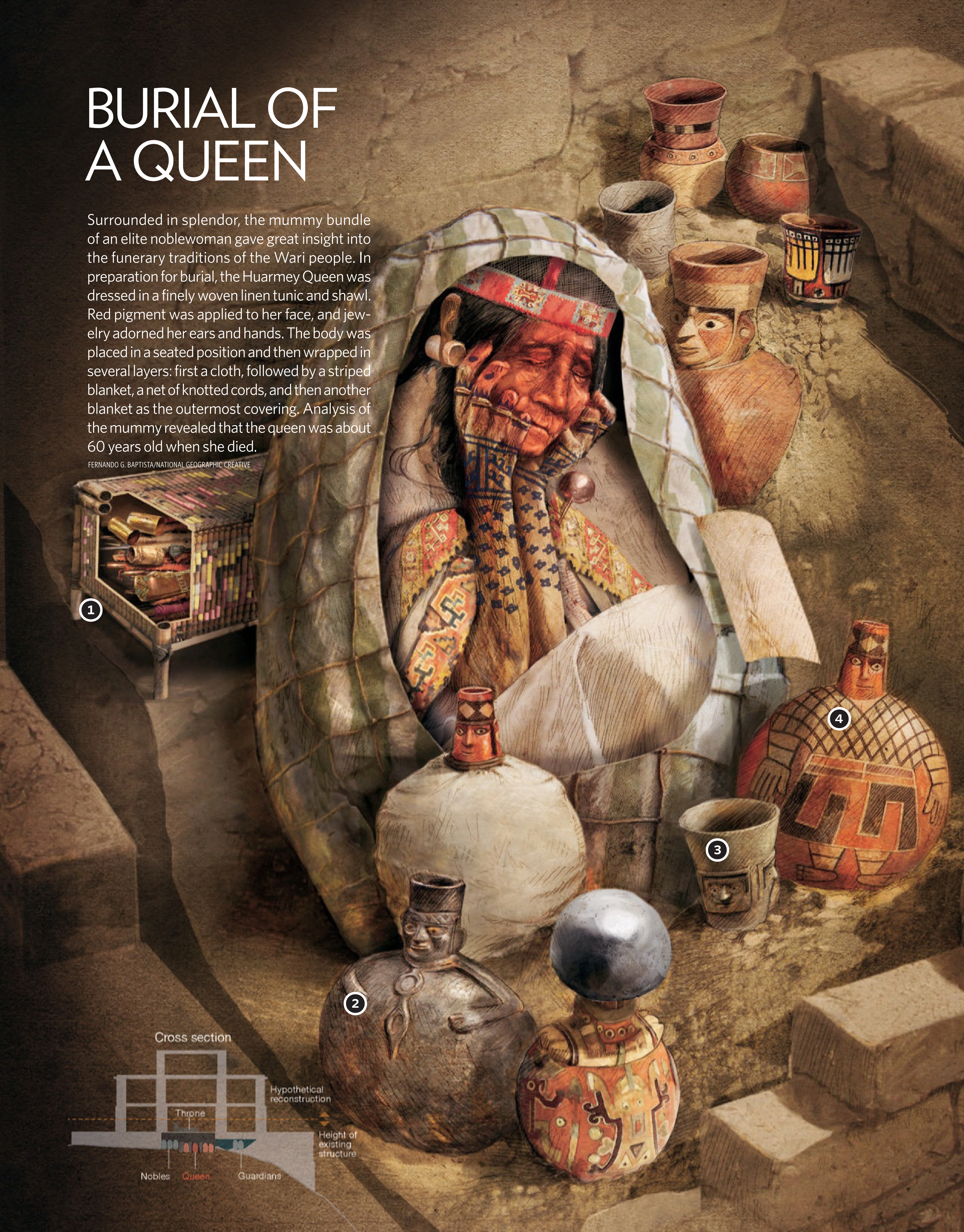


THE HUARMEY QUEEN, FACIAL RECONSTRUCTION BY OSCAR NILSSON

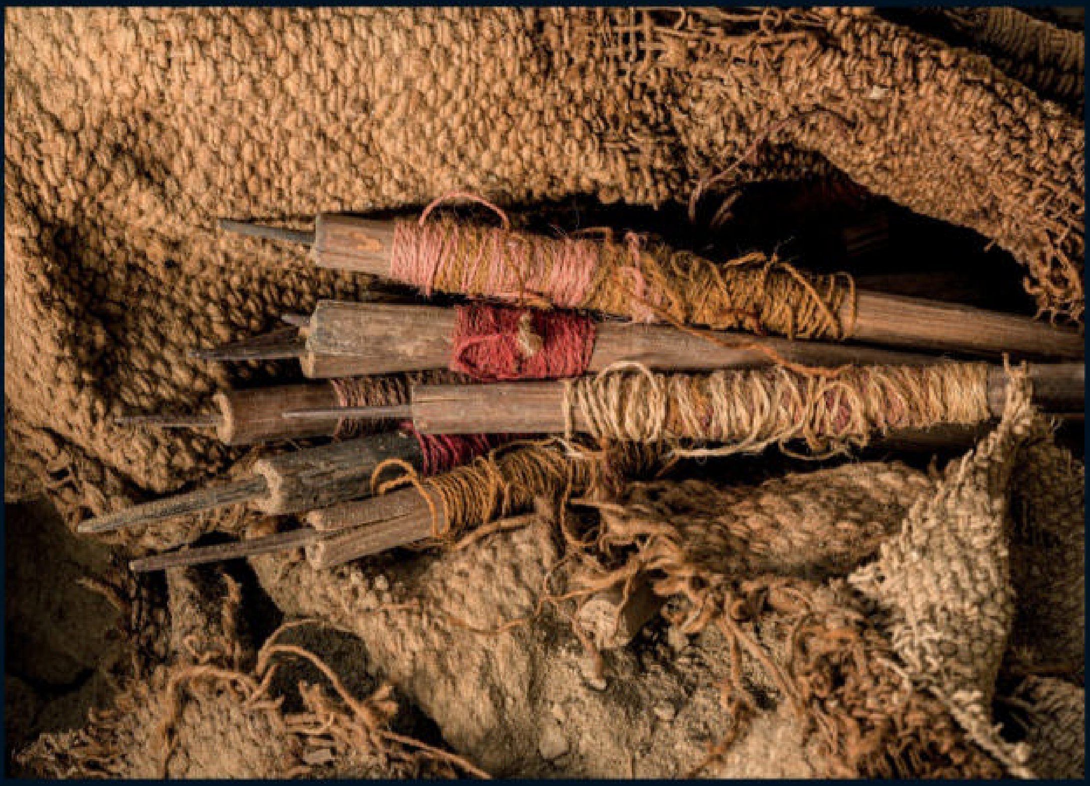
OSCAR NILSSON/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

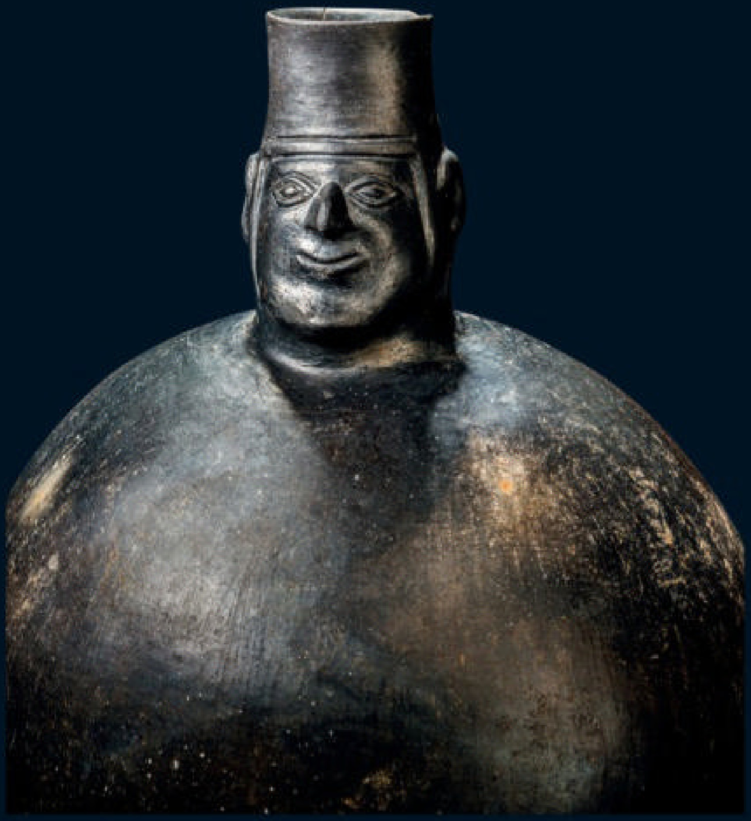
BURIAL OF A QUEEN

Surrounded in splendor, the mummy bundle of an elite noblewoman gave great insight into the funerary traditions of the Wari people. In preparation for burial, the Huarmey Queen was dressed in a finely woven linen tunic and shawl. Red pigment was applied to her face, and jewelry adorned her ears and hands. The body was placed in a seated position and then wrapped in several layers: first a cloth, followed by a striped blanket, a net of knotted cords, and then another blanket as the outermost covering. Analysis of the mummy revealed that the queen was about 60 years old when she died.


1
2
3
4
Cross section
Hypothetical reconstruction
Throne
Height of existing structure
Nobles
Queen
Guardians

FERNANDO G. BAPTISTA/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE



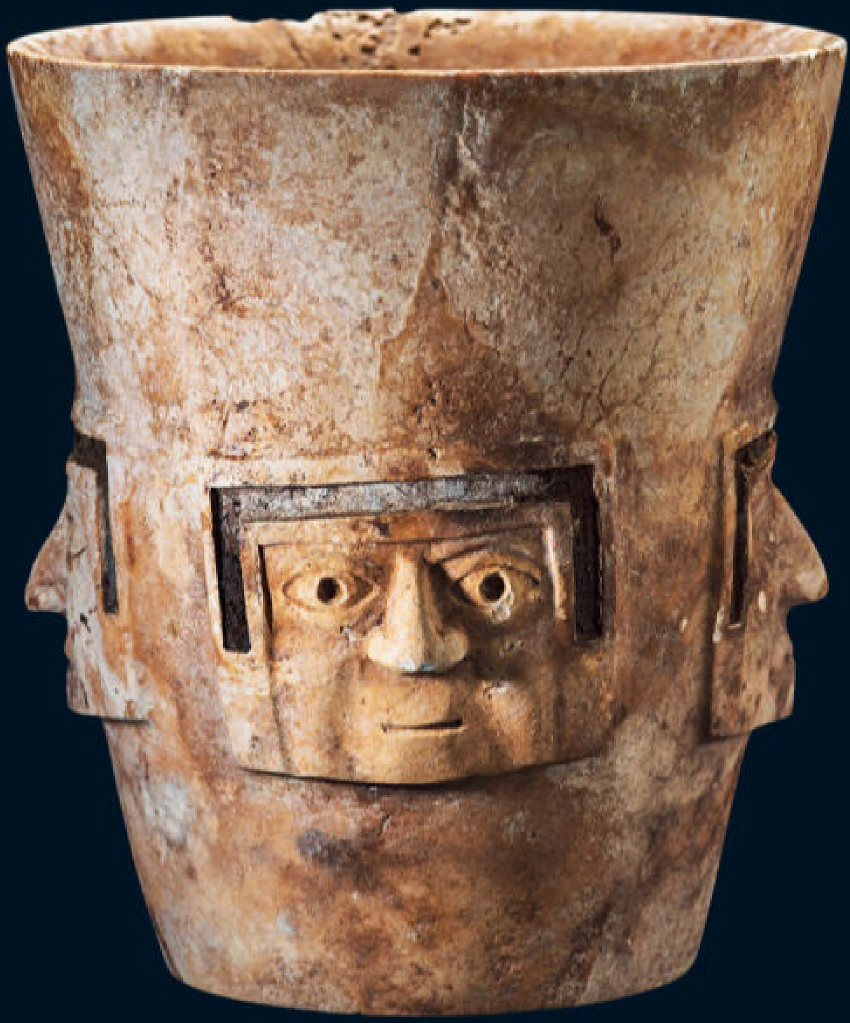


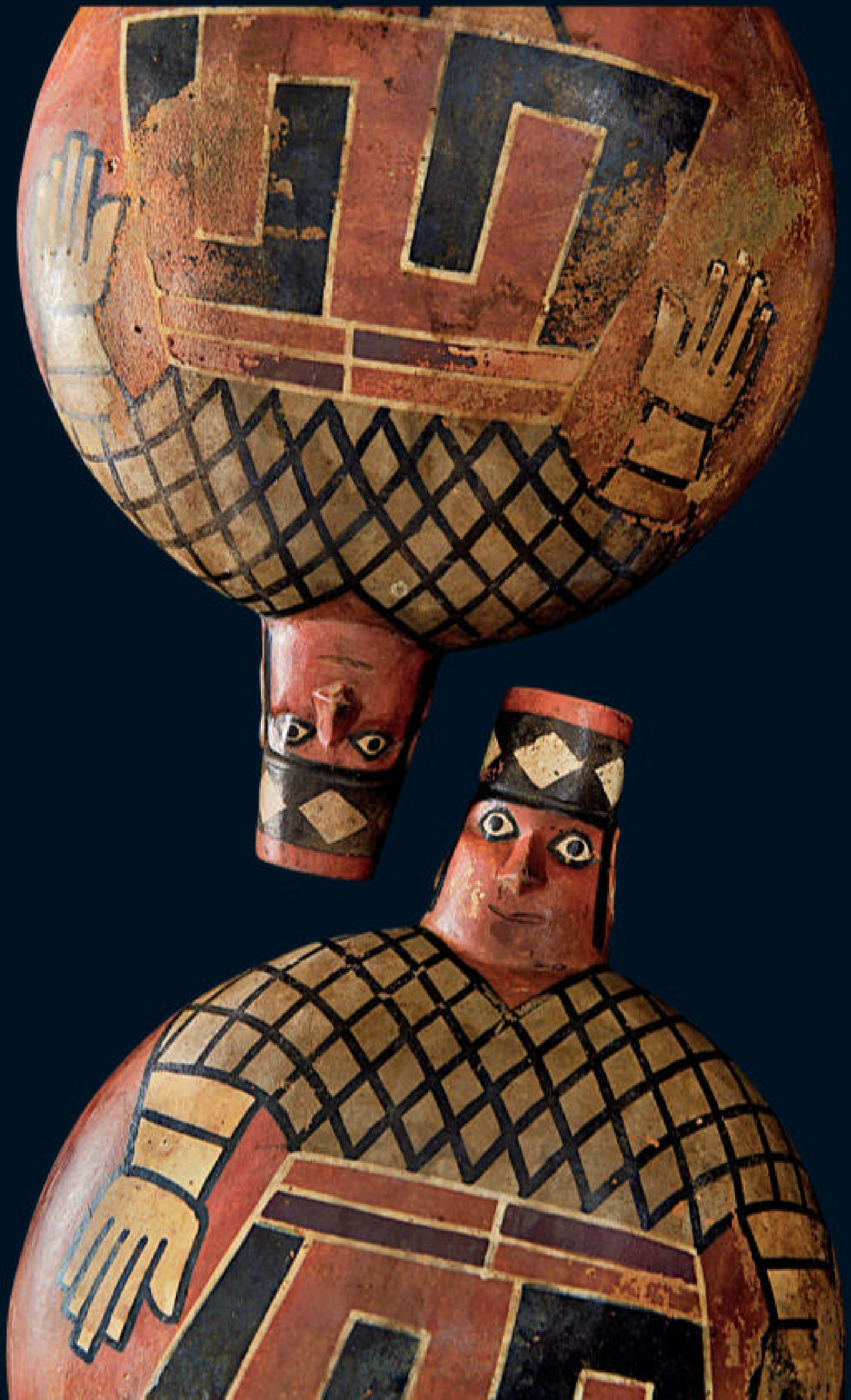
▲ ① **TOOLS AND SPOOLS**
Perhaps the most personal and valuable objects in the tomb were sets of weaving tools and spools of thread found with the deceased. Wari women, including the elite, were skilled weavers.

▲ ② **GRINNING FLASKS**
Surrounding the queen's mummy were ceramic flasks and jars, some of the finest specimens ever found from Wari culture.

▼ ③ **WHITE STONE KERO**
Working with an alabaster-like Andean stone, an artisan carved this drinking cup adorned with human faces.

④ **WELL ROUNDED** ▶
Boldly geometric patterns on these painted ceramic vessels depict Wari lords.





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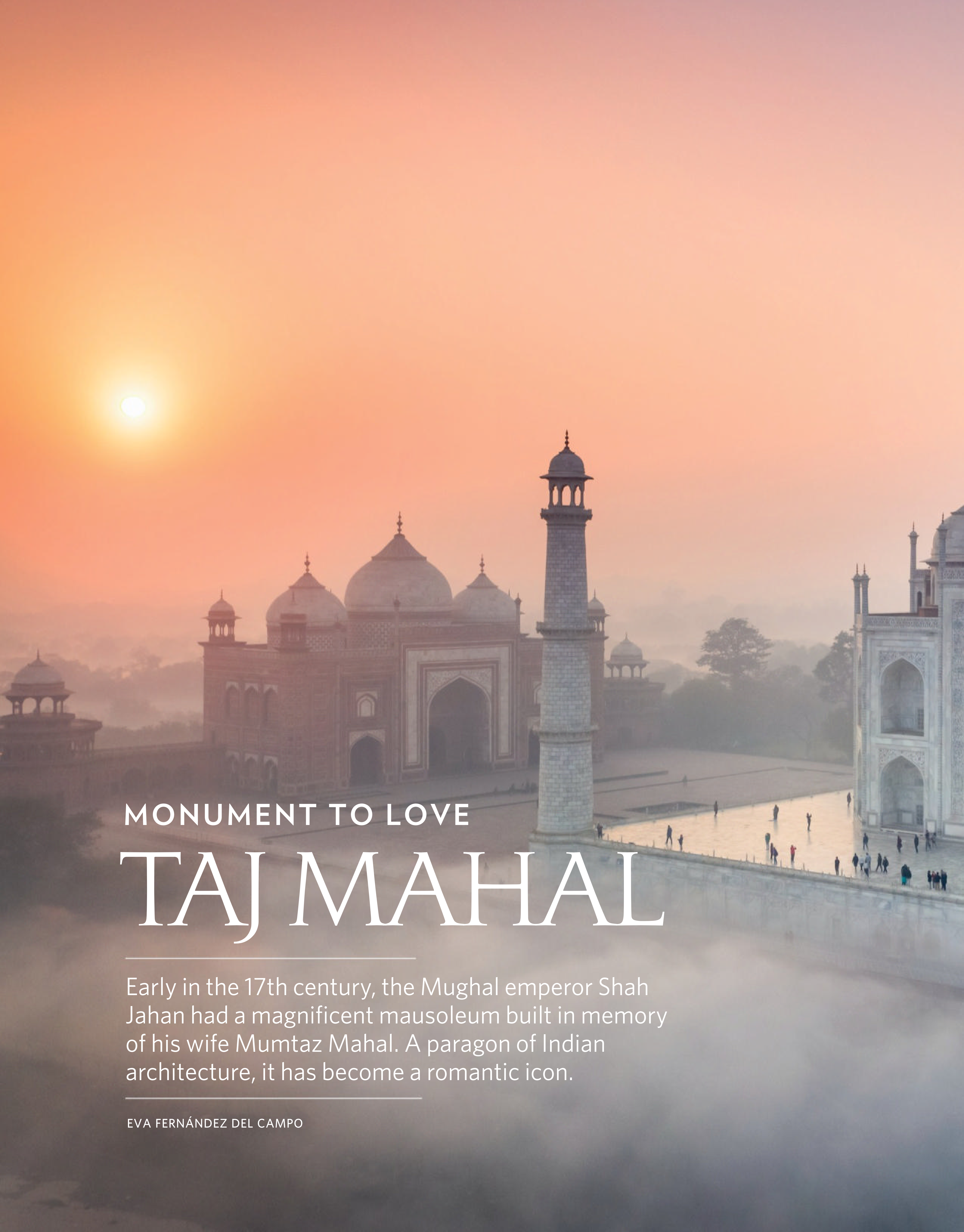
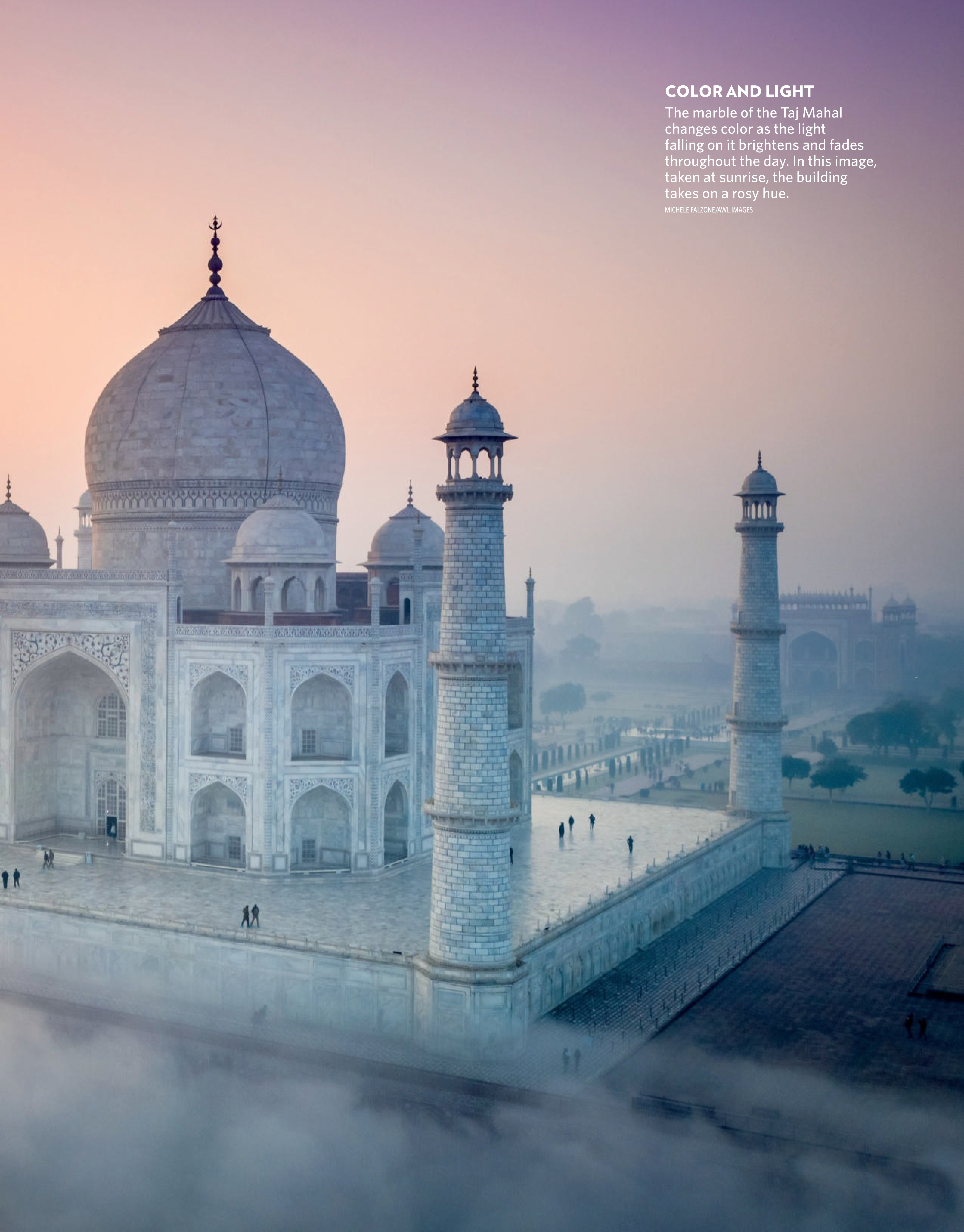


MONUMENT TO LOVE

TAJ MAHAL

Early in the 17th century, the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan had a magnificent mausoleum built in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. A paragon of Indian architecture, it has become a romantic icon.

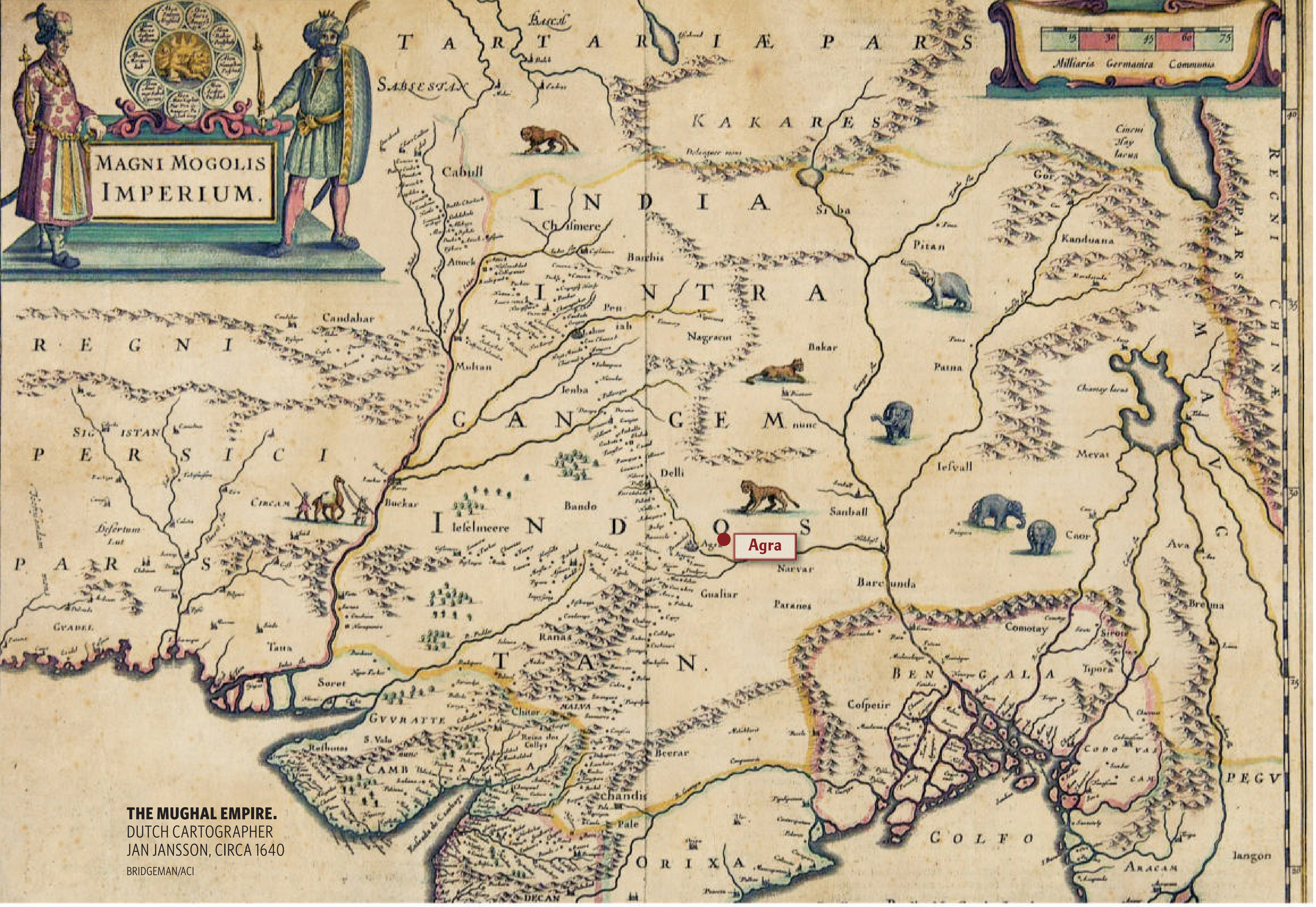
EVA FERNÁNDEZ DEL CAMPO



COLOR AND LIGHT

The marble of the Taj Mahal changes color as the light falling on it brightens and fades throughout the day. In this image, taken at sunrise, the building takes on a rosy hue.

MICHELE FALZONE/AWL IMAGES


MAGNI MOGOLIS IMPERIUM.
TARTARIÆ PARS
KAKARES
INDIA INTRA GANGEM
INDOSTAN
REGNI PERSICI PARS
Cabull
Candahar
Multan
Delli
Agra
Gualiar
Patna
Kanduana
BENGALA
GUZARATTE
CAMBAIA
ORIXA
GOLFO
PEGU
ARACAN
Milliaria Germanica Communia
REGNI CHINÆ PARS

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE. DUTCH CARTOGRAPHER JAN JANSSON, CIRCA 1640

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

The Taj Mahal is not only the most iconic symbol of India's Mughal emperors but one of the best-known works of art and architecture in the world. It is a lavish mausoleum commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan, the fifth ruler of the great Mughal dynasty, to house the body of his beloved Mumtaz Mahal, who died while giving birth to their 14th child.

The Mughals were a Muslim dynasty of Mongol origin whose founder, Babur, descended from Genghis Khan. "Mughal" is derived from the Persian for Mongol and the source of the English word "mogul." From 1526 to 1857, the Mughals ruled an empire that, at its peak in the late 1600s, was the largest and wealthiest on Earth. Mughal lands once extended from present-day Iran and Afghanistan to Pakistan and Uzbekistan, including almost all of the Indian subcontinent. The Mughals were known for their military prowess, financial and trading skills, intermittent religious tolerance of non-Islamic faiths, and love of the arts.

Over the centuries, the Taj Mahal (Persian for "crown palace") has endured as a site of religious pilgrimage and a romantic destination for lovers. In 1983 it was named a UNESCO World Heritage site, and in 2007 it was chosen by people voting on six continents as one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World.

THE CAREW SPINEL IS ENGRAVED WITH NAMES OF MUGHAL EMPERORS, INCLUDING SHAH JAHAN. 17TH CENTURY. V&A MUSEUM, LONDON

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

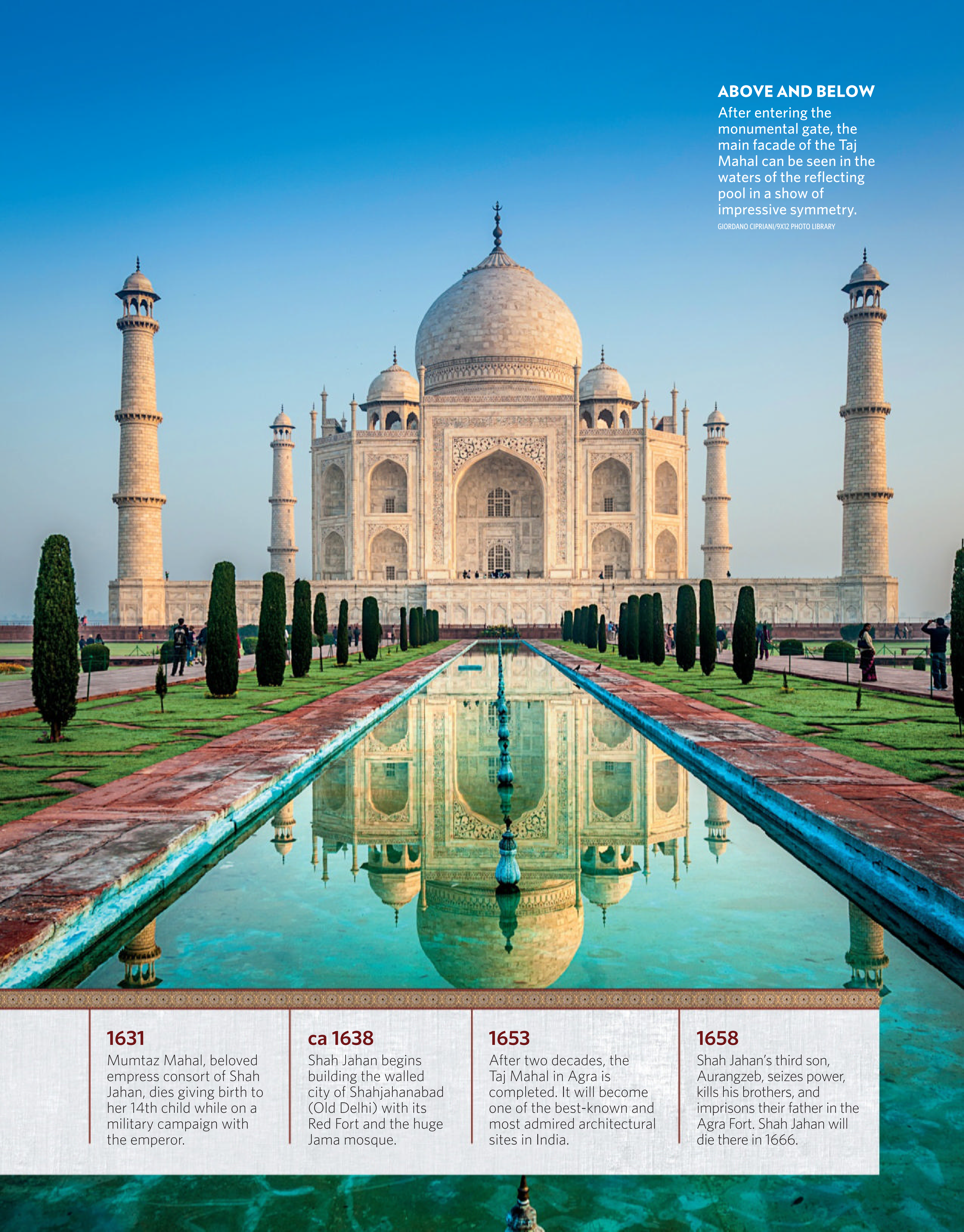
RULE OF SHAH JAHAN

1526

Babur founds the Mughal dynasty in India. His capital is Kabul (today in Afghanistan). His empire stretches to Fergana, in modern-day Uzbekistan.

1628

A year after Emperor Jahangir dies, his son Khurram succeeds him as Shah Jahan I. He is the grandson of Akbar, who extended Mughal rule across most of India.



ABOVE AND BELOW
After entering the monumental gate, the main facade of the Taj Mahal can be seen in the waters of the reflecting pool in a show of impressive symmetry.

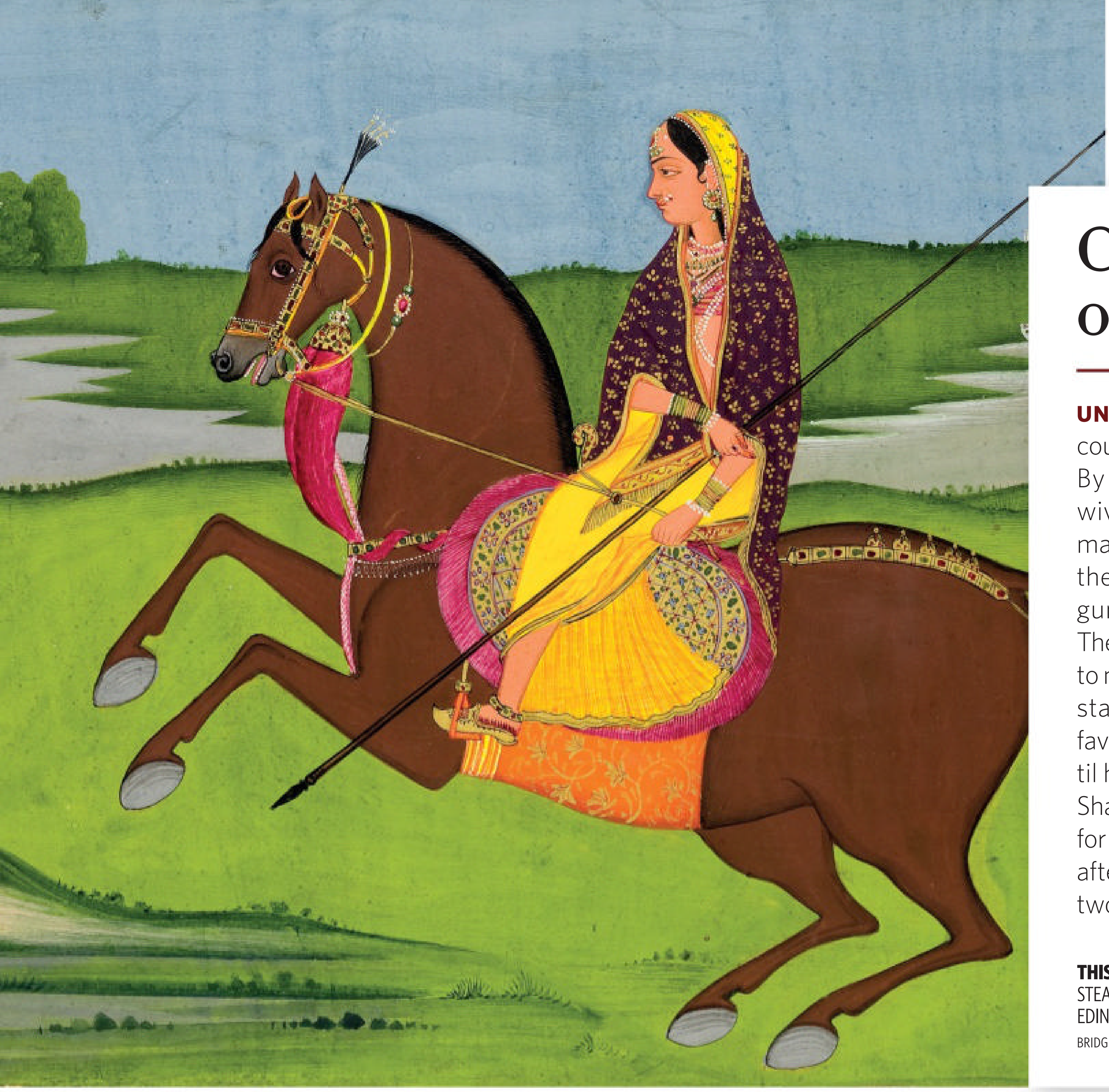
GIORDANO CIPRIANI/9X12 PHOTO LIBRARY

1631
Mumtaz Mahal, beloved empress consort of Shah Jahan, dies giving birth to her 14th child while on a military campaign with the emperor.

ca 1638
Shah Jahan begins building the walled city of Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi) with its Red Fort and the huge Jama mosque.

1653
After two decades, the Taj Mahal in Agra is completed. It will become one of the best-known and most admired architectural sites in India.

1658
Shah Jahan's third son, Aurangzeb, seizes power, kills his brothers, and imprisons their father in the Agra Fort. Shah Jahan will die there in 1666.



Chosen One of the Palace

UNDER ISLAMIC LAW, Mughal emperors could have four contractual wives *(begum)*. By custom, they also had lower-status wives as well as concubines. Shah Jahan married five times, twice before marrying the Persian princess Arjumand Banu Begum, known as Mumtaz Mahal, in 1612. They met as teenagers but waited five years to marry until court astrologers thought the stars aligned. Mumtaz was Shah Jahan's favorite wife and was empress consort until her death in 1631. They had 14 children. Shah Jahan married two more "royal wives" for political reasons, but he never remarried after Mumtaz's death. He devoted the next two decades to building the Taj Mahal.

THIS HUNTRESS, IDENTIFIED BY SOME AS MUMTAZ MAHAL, STEADIES HER HORSE. 18TH-19TH CENTURY. UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH LIBRARY

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

GROWING WEALTH

Coins of silver (below), minted during the reign of Shah Jahan's grandfather, Akbar the Great, represented the empire's wealth, enhanced through the centralization of its finances. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

Loving Couple

The woman who would one day rest in the Taj Mahal was born Arjumand Banu Begum in 1593 in Agra, India, to Persian nobility. Her father was the brother-in-law of Shah Jahan's father, Jahangir. Her beauty was so arresting that Prince Khurram (as Shah Jahan was then known) fell in love with her on sight. They were betrothed in 1607 and married when it was deemed propitious in 1612. Khurram renamed her Mumtaz ("chosen one of the palace") shortly after their marriage.

Together Mumtaz and Shah Jahan traveled the Mughal Empire for 19 years. She rarely left his side and accompanied him on military campaigns, even during her 14 pregnancies and throughout his campaign to overthrow his father. Mumtaz was his confidante and counselor, yet she did not seek political power for herself, even after Shah Jahan's successfully secured the throne in 1628, a year after his father's death.

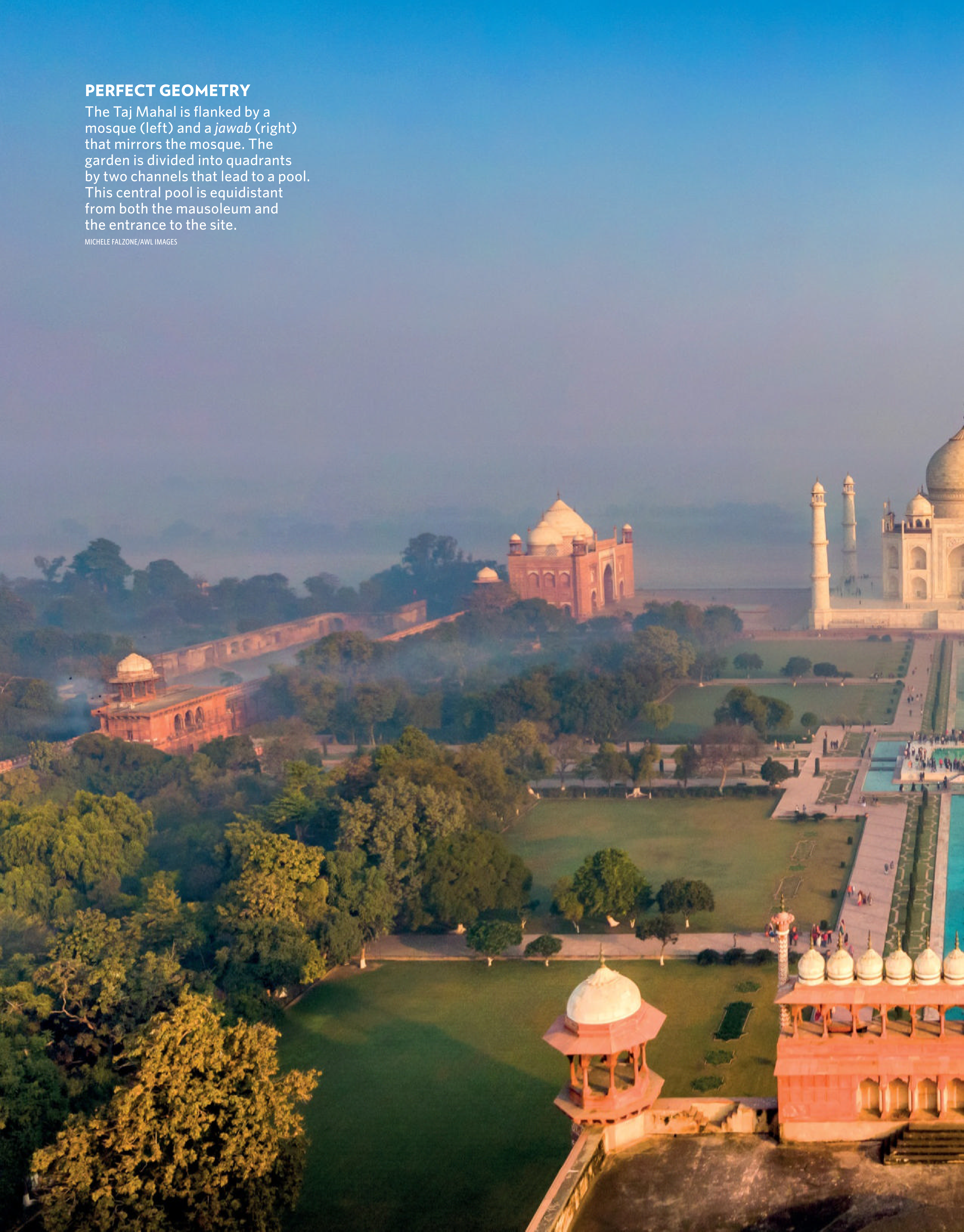
Shah Jahan was renowned for his exquisite taste and for being a major patron of the arts. He was fascinated with gemology and supported the work of court miniaturists, who became famous worldwide for their elaborate decoration in the margins of their paintings and for their mastery of floral designs. Shah Jahan focused much of his energy on architectural design, continuing the magnificent tradition of his predecessors. He completed the Agra Fort, with its distinctive red sandstone; the Lahore Fort, with its beautiful marble and tile work; the Red Fort in Delhi; and impressive mosques in Lahore and Delhi—but his most famous monumental work of them all is the glorious Taj Mahal.

Seven of the 14 children born to Mumtaz and Shah Jahan lived past infancy. Mumtaz died in childbirth when she and Shah Jahan were on a military campaign in 1631, and he never fully recovered from the loss of his wife. For the next two decades, he focused on building a timeless memorial to their eternal love. In part because Shah Jahan was so preoccupied with Mumtaz's Taj Mahal, the empire's concerns were neglected. In 1658 their son Aurangzeb wrested control of the empire from his father while killing off his three brothers. He cloistered Shah Jahan in the Agra Fort until his father's death in 1666.

THE AGRA FORT

The fortress was completed during the reign of Shah Jahan, who then spent his final years imprisoned within its walls. It is built from distinctive red sandstone.

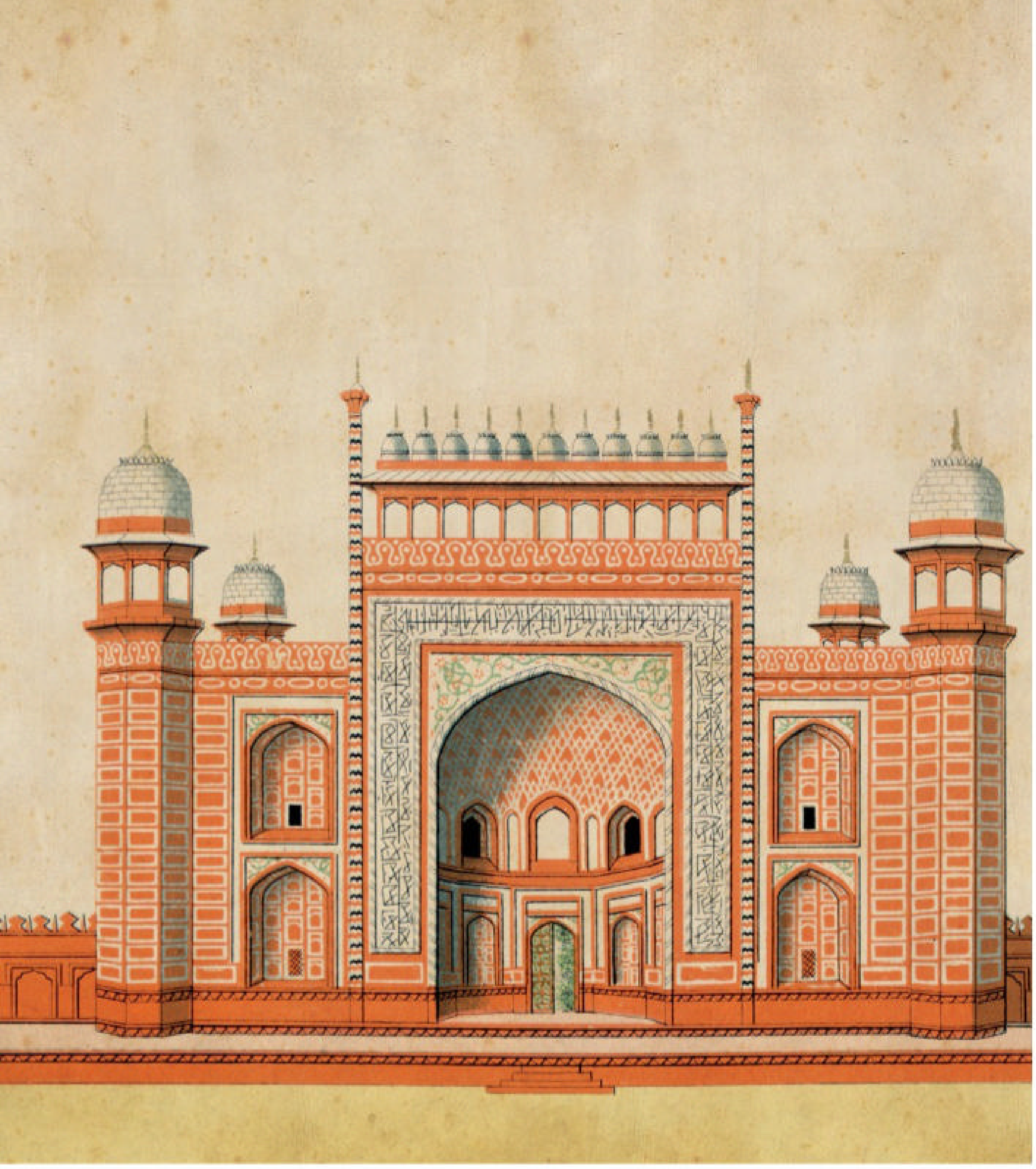
LUIGI VACARELLA/FOTOTECA 9X12



PERFECT GEOMETRY

The Taj Mahal is flanked by a mosque (left) and a *jawab* (right) that mirrors the mosque. The garden is divided into quadrants by two channels that lead to a pool. This central pool is equidistant from both the mausoleum and the entrance to the site.

MICHELE FALZONE/AWL IMAGES



MAKING AN ENTRANCE

A 19th-century lithograph (above) shows the north face of the Taj Mahal's Great Gateway. Flanked by two-story arches, the entrance is set into a recessed arch known as an *iwan*.

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

The Jewel of Agra

Although it is not known which architect was in overall charge of planning and directing work on the Taj Mahal, contemporary chronicles do mention several designers involved with its construction. There was Ismail Khan, who had built domes in Turkey; Amanat Khan, a master calligrapher from Shiraz; and Mukrimat Khan and Mir Abdul-Karim, the chief administrators of the project, also from Shiraz. Many artisans from around the world worked on the decoration, and the materials they chose were always the finest.

No expense or political inconvenience was spared in its construction. As Peter Frankopan writes in *The Silk Roads*, "Gold and silver taken from the Americas found its way to Asia; it was this redistribution of wealth that enabled the Taj Mahal to be built. Not without irony, one of the glories of India was the result of the suffering of 'Indians' on the other side of the world."

According to French gem merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who published an account of his travels in Persia and India in 1676, the project had more than 20,000 workers (and 1,000 elephants). The status and treatment of those workers are still hotly disputed among historians, and all was financed through heavy taxes. Made entirely of pure white marble from the quarries of Makrana, the Taj Mahal itself took 16 years to build; the entire complex was completed in 1653. Although it drained the coffers of the Mughal Empire, the end result has become a universal symbol of India and a masterwork of universal art.

Beholding the Wonder

The Taj Mahal is in Agra, a major city in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It stands on the bank of the Yamuna River, surrounded by a beautiful garden irrigated by canals. The building complex is in a rectangular area of 42 acres, enclosed by a great wall. To enter, one must pass through a monumental three-story gateway known as an *iwan*; this huge arched structure is built in red sandstone with marble facades.

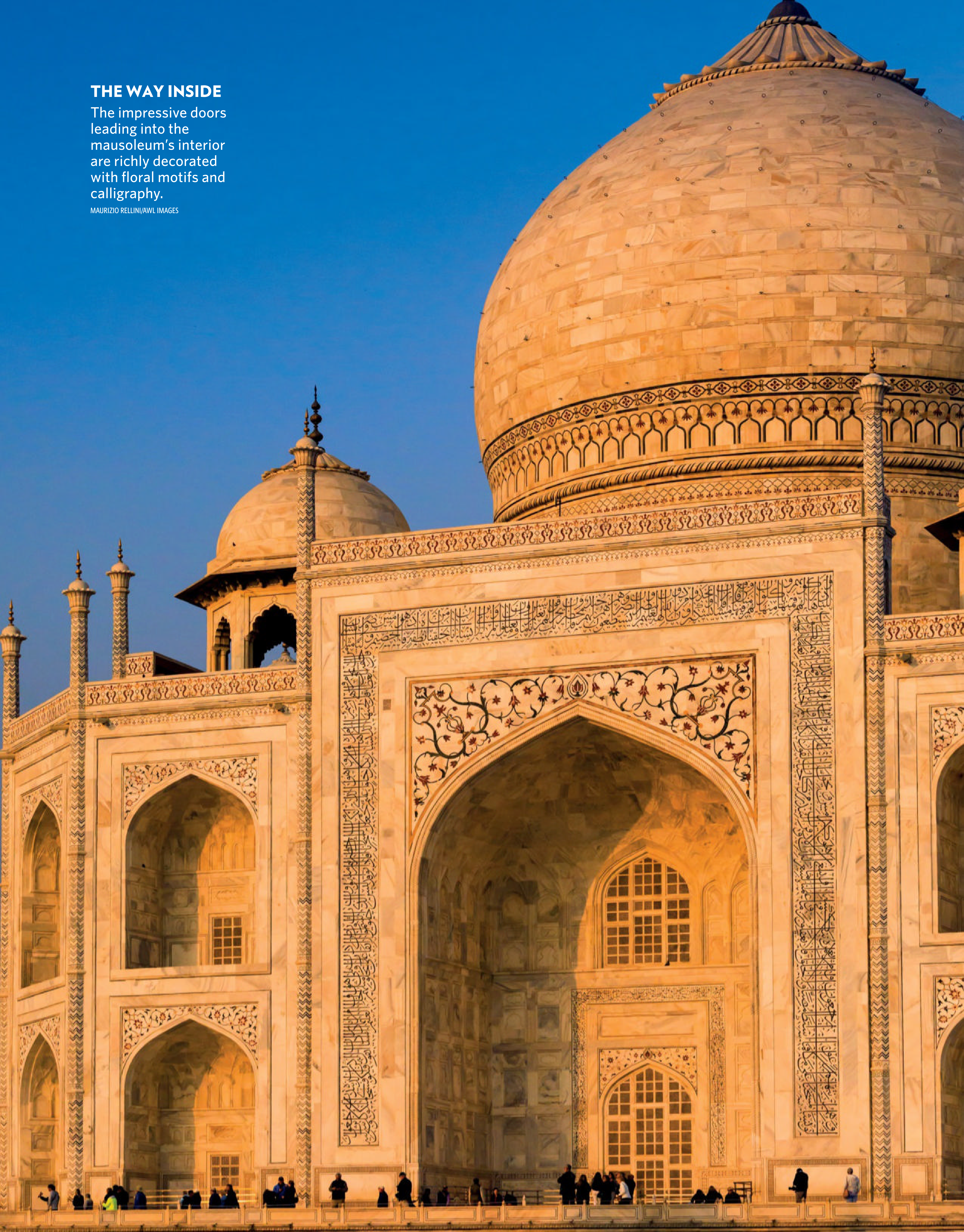
When the tomb comes into sight, the view is breathtaking. The marble mausoleum rises on its plinth at the far end of the garden, not in the center, as was standard for Indo-Persian tombs. Its image is reflected in a long rectangular pool the length of the garden. Flanking the main mausoleum are two buildings of red sandstone: a mosque, to the left facing Mecca; and to the right, a *jawab* ("echo of the mosque"), a shelter for pilgrims, perfectly balancing the layout of the whole. The mosque and the jawab are each topped by two large *chhatris*—canopies in the form of a raised pavilion topped with a dome, an element widely used in Indian architecture.

The central mausoleum, despite its apparent delicacy, is immense: approximately 180 feet by 180 feet, and chamfered into an octagon. It stands on a square platform 313 feet wide and roughly 22 feet high. Minarets, around 130 feet tall, stand at each corner of the platform. An

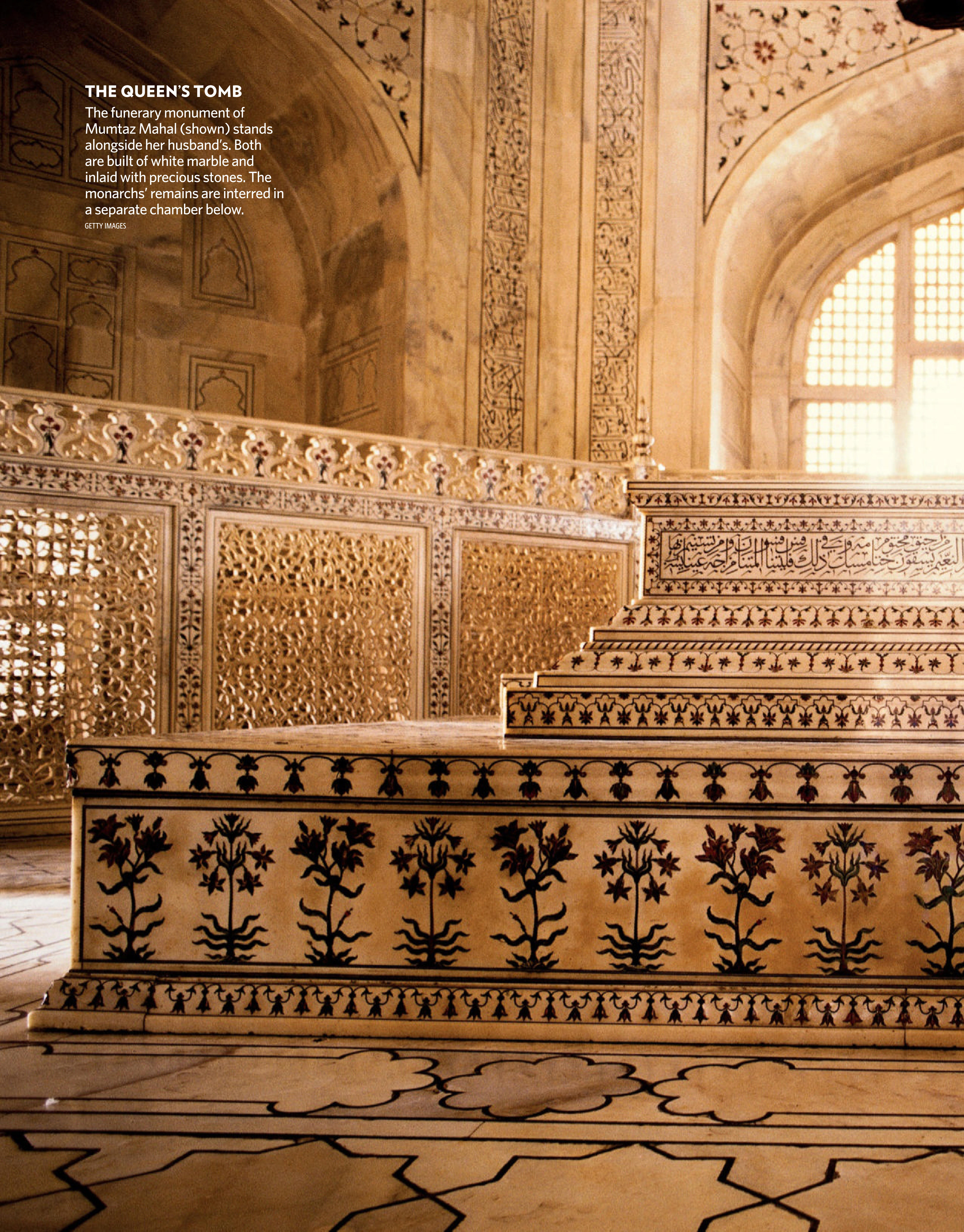
The Taj Mahal is made entirely of pure white marble from the quarries of Makrana.

GOAT-HEADED WINE CUP MADE FOR SHAH JAHAN. WHITE JADE NEPHRITE, 1657. V&A MUSEUM, LONDON

PRISMA/ALBUM



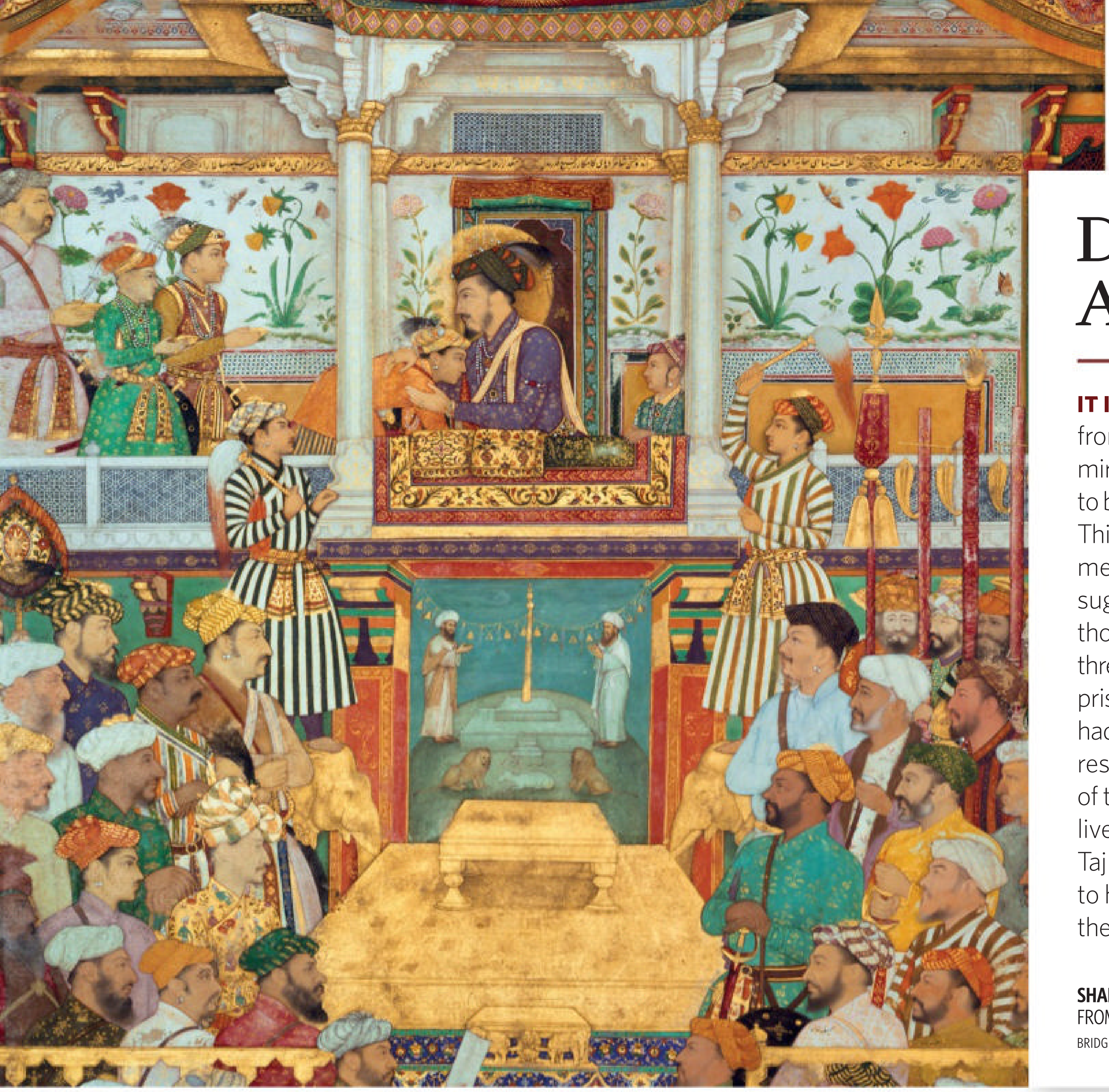
THE WAY INSIDE
The impressive doors leading into the mausoleum's interior are richly decorated with floral motifs and calligraphy.
MAURIZIO RELLINI/AWL IMAGES



THE QUEEN'S TOMB

The funerary monument of Mumtaz Mahal (shown) stands alongside her husband's. Both are built of white marble and inlaid with precious stones. The monarchs' remains are interred in a separate chamber below.

GETTY IMAGES



Death of An Emperor

IT IS SAID that Shah Jahan never recovered from Mumtaz's death. He planned his own mirror mausoleum, entirely of black marble, to be linked to her Taj Mahal by a river bridge. This legend is based on the unusually asymmetrical placement of the two cenotaphs, suggesting that Shah Jahan's was an afterthought. In 1658 his son Aurangzeb killed his three brothers, overthrew Shah Jahan, and imprisoned his father until his death in 1666. He had no state funeral. The story's romanticism resonates: Shah Jahan was held in a tower of the Agra Fort, where he and Mumtaz had lived, and from which he could gaze on the Taj Mahal. Aurangzeb buried his father next to his mother beneath the Taj Mahal, under their empty public tombs.

SHAH JAHAN'S ACCESSION, IN A 17TH-CENTURY ILLUSTRATION FROM THE CHRONICLE OF HIS REIGN, THE *PADSHAHNAMA*

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

A SHAH TO THE RESCUE

Shah Jahan rescues a courtier from a lion in this mid-17th-century cameo made of sardonyx, gold, and enamel. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

AURIMAGES

iwan opens up from each of the cardinal points of the main structure, which is crowned by an imposing double layered central dome and four *chhatris*. The interior space is also octagonal and divided into four octagonal rooms. The cenotaphs of the royal couple are found here and replicate the tombs with the remains of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, which are located in an underground chamber.

The Taj Mahal is famous for the exquisite harmony of its proportions. The overall impression is that each element is vital to the balance of the whole. The marble, too, produces spectacular color changes as the light shifts: a dazzling white under bright midday sun, pink at dawn, and translucent by moonlight.

Between the vast plinth and the sandstone entrance is an immense garden, 1,000 feet wide. It evokes the Islamic paradise (Bagh-e-Adan) and once held floral shrubs, fruit trees, and flowers. In its center, a marble pool lies equidistant from the mausoleum and the monumental entrance, flanked by an arched courtyard.

The outstanding beauty of the Taj Mahal comes not only from its graceful architecture but also from its gorgeous decoration, created mainly with *pietra dura* (hard stone) set into white marble, a technique known in India as *parchinkari*. The designs are both intricate and exuberant: plant motifs, flowers, and vases *(guldastas)* allude to paradise, and Quranic verses adorn the walls with elegant calligraphy.

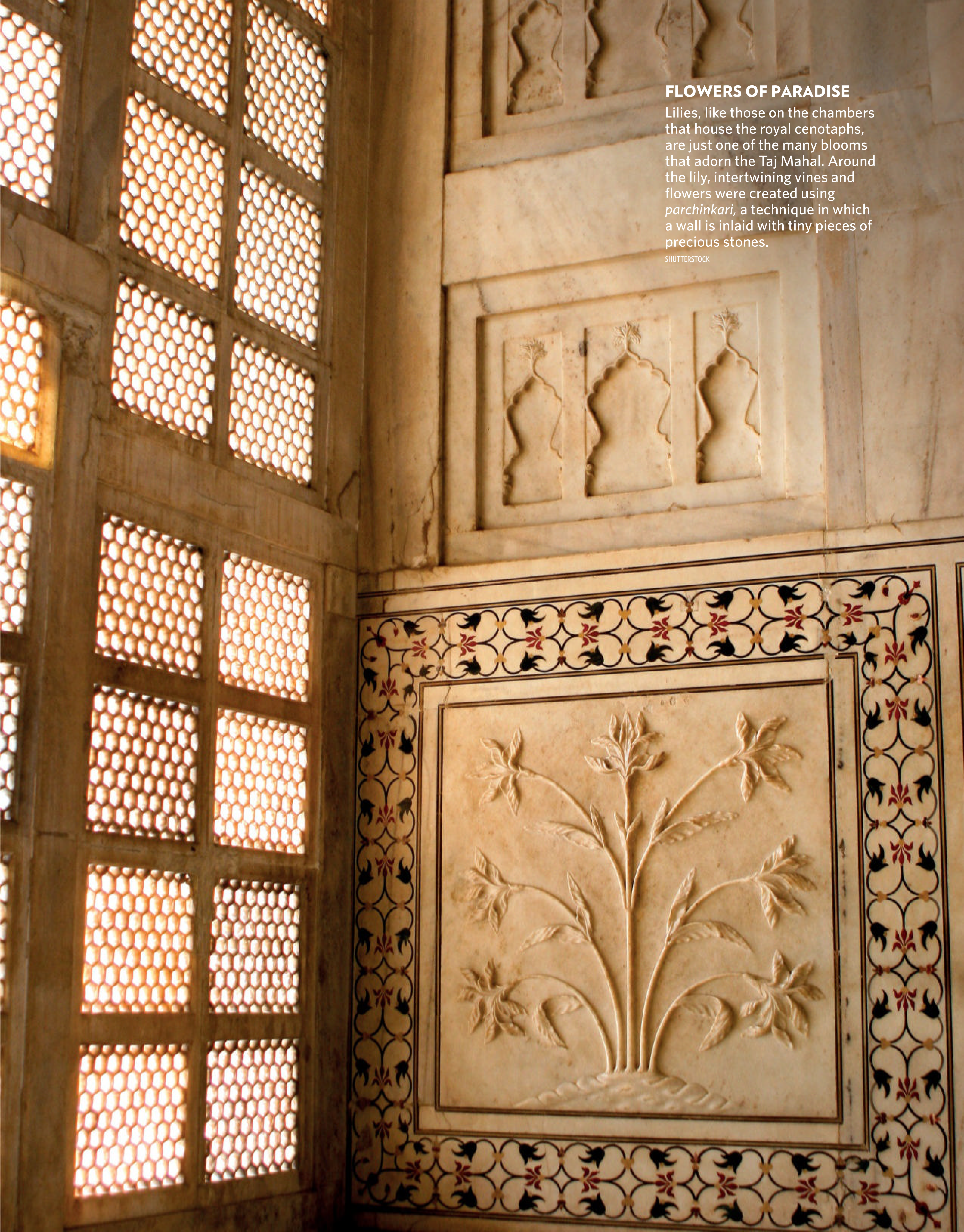
British writer Rudyard Kipling describes arriving by train to see the Taj Mahal for the first time: "The Taj took a hundred new shapes; each perfect and each beyond description. It was the Ivory Gate through which all good dreams come." Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore was similarly enraptured: "Only let this one tear-drop, this Taj Mahal, glisten spotlessly bright on the cheek of time, forever and ever." It is the teardrop shed in grief by Shah Jahan for his beloved Mumtaz Mahal. ■

EVA FERNÁNDEZ DEL CAMPO IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ASIATIC ART AT THE COMPLUTENSE UNIVERSITY OF MADRID.

Learn more

The Complete Taj Mahal
Ebba Koch, Thames & Hudson, 2011.

The Mughal Throne
Abraham Eraly, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003.



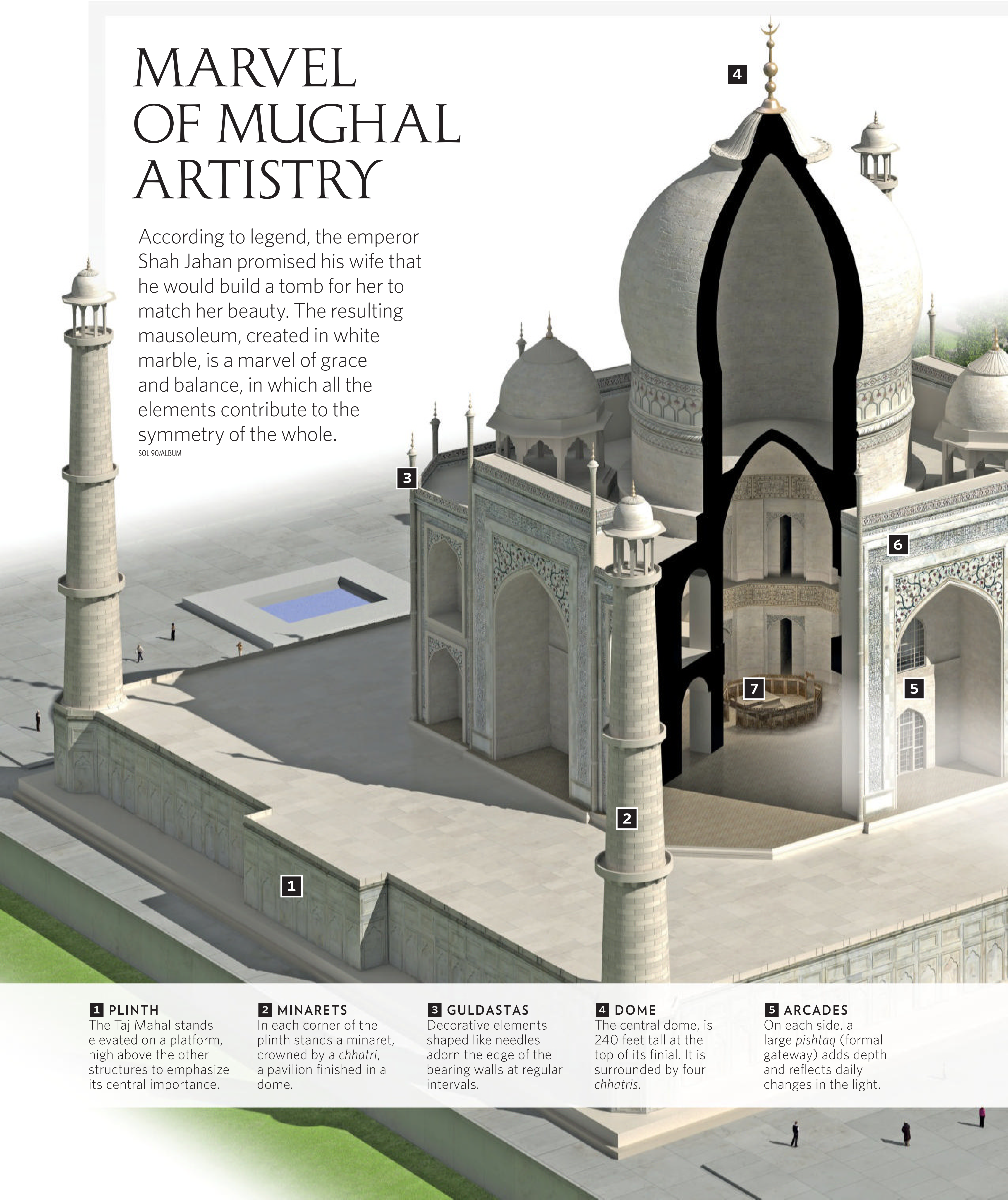
FLOWERS OF PARADISE

Lilies, like those on the chambers that house the royal cenotaphs, are just one of the many blooms that adorn the Taj Mahal. Around the lily, intertwining vines and flowers were created using *parchinkari,* a technique in which a wall is inlaid with tiny pieces of precious stones.

SHUTTERSTOCK

MARVEL OF MUGHAL ARTISTRY

According to legend, the emperor Shah Jahan promised his wife that he would build a tomb for her to match her beauty. The resulting mausoleum, created in white marble, is a marvel of grace and balance, in which all the elements contribute to the symmetry of the whole.



SOL 90/ALBUM

1 PLINTH
The Taj Mahal stands elevated on a platform, high above the other structures to emphasize its central importance.

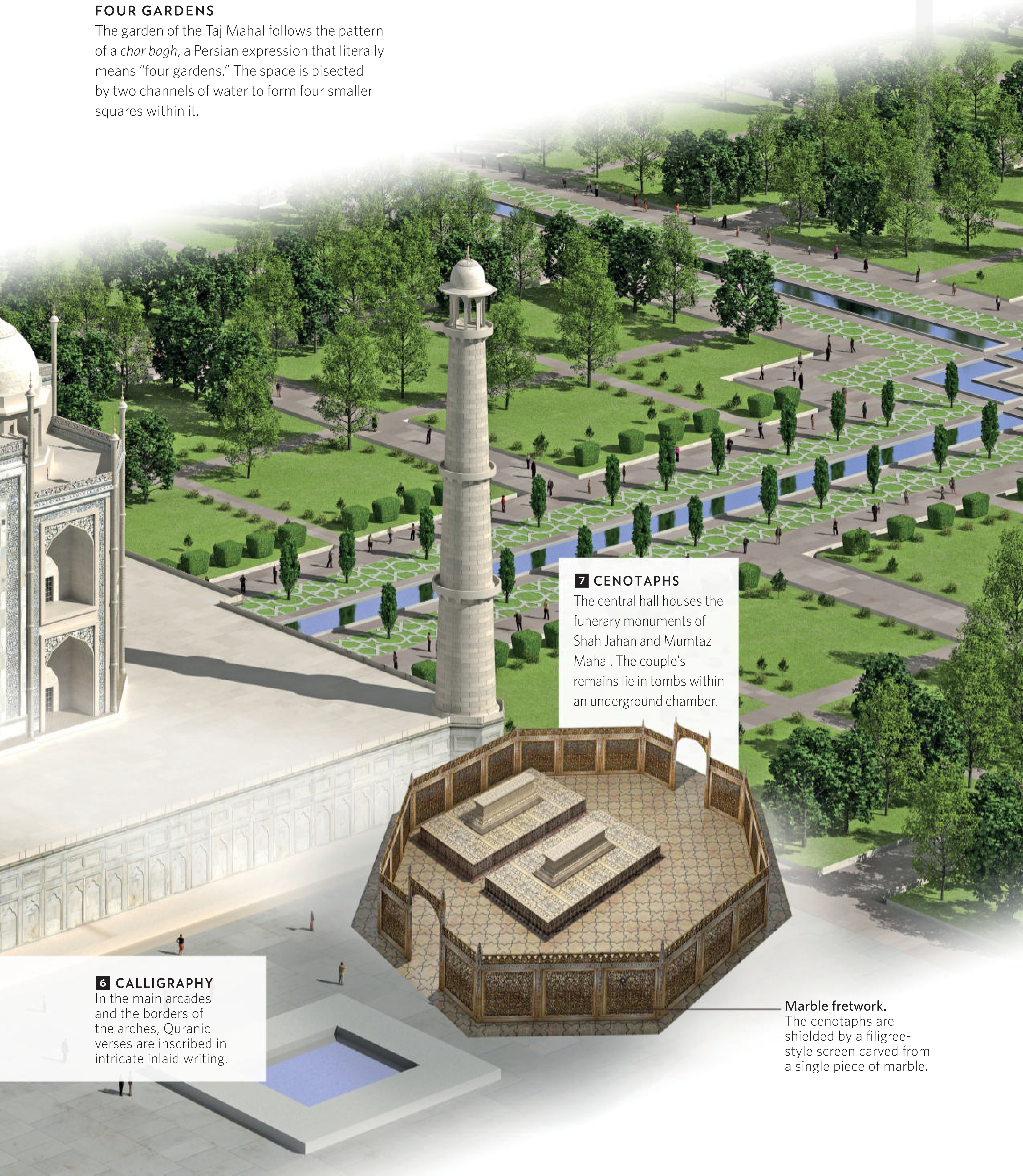
2 MINARETS
In each corner of the plinth stands a minaret, crowned by a *chhatri*, a pavilion finished in a dome.

3 GULDASTAS
Decorative elements shaped like needles adorn the edge of the bearing walls at regular intervals.

4 DOME
The central dome, is 240 feet tall at the top of its finial. It is surrounded by four *chhatris*.

5 ARCADES
On each side, a large *pishtaq* (formal gateway) adds depth and reflects daily changes in the light.

FOUR GARDENS
The garden of the Taj Mahal follows the pattern of a *char bagh*, a Persian expression that literally means "four gardens." The space is bisected by two channels of water to form four smaller squares within it.



7 CENOTAPHS
The central hall houses the funerary monuments of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. The couple's remains lie in tombs within an underground chamber.

6 CALLIGRAPHY
In the main arcades and the borders of the arches, Quranic verses are inscribed in intricate inlaid writing.

Marble fretwork.
The cenotaphs are shielded by a filigree-style screen carved from a single piece of marble.

Ancient Iran's Mysterious Bronzes

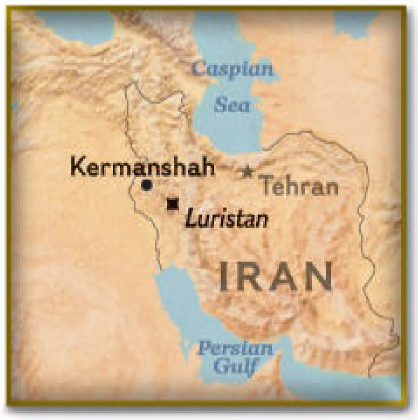
In the 1930s ancient artifacts recovered in the mountains of Luristan wowed archaeologists but spawned many questions about their origins.

A HORNED FIGURE tames mythical beasts in this elaborate cheekpiece from a horse's bit, produced in Luristan in about 700 B.C. Cleveland Museum of Art

ARTOKOLORO/ALAMY

When exquisite bronze figures began flooding the antiquities market in the late 1920s, nobody knew much about them. Artworks of people and animals, embossed bronze cups, and delicate pins thrilled dealers, who were awed by their beauty. Inquiries were made about their origins, but answers were somewhat vague. Rather than name a specific settlement or civilization, dealers would only indicate a region in the Zagros Mountains: Luristan (located in western Iran and known today as Lorestan).

The deluge of Luristan bronzes began in fall 1928 in the sleepy town of Harsin, some 20 miles east of Kermanshah. A local farmer uncovered several beautiful bronze objects in his fields and sold them. Word of his finds spread, and soon the town filled with dealers who bought these works of art and then sold them on to museums and private collections. It was a profitable arrangement that suited many parties, and very little was done to stop it.



Great interest in excavating these bronzes arose among both academics and locals. André Godard, the director of the Iranian Archaeological Service in 1928, described the method used by the locals to detect a site to excavate. First they found a spring. Once that was located, there was a high probability of finding a settlement nearby with a cemetery. The formula was simple and effective: Look for a water source, and an ancient necropolis will not be far away.

Archaeologists in the Air

The first Western archaeologist to investigate the bronzes was German-born archaeologist Erich Schmidt, who first began exploring Luristan in 1935. His work at the site was innovative thanks to his wife, Mary-Helen. The two shared a passion for archaeology: They first met when visiting the site of Tepe Hissar in Iran.

Mary-Helen advocated using airplanes to scope out the sites from above, and she bought one for the missions. Named the *Friend of Iran,* the plane surveyed Luristan and other Iranian sites, including Persepolis (ancient capital of the Persian Empire), that Schmidt would be studying. After permission was secured from Iran, reconnaissance flights flew in 1935-36 and again in 1937. Schmidt's aerial photography would prove valuable not only for documenting the sites but also for methodically planning out the excavations.

In June 1938 Schmidt's

FLOOD OF ARTIFACTS

1928
The antiquities market is flooded with ancient bronze artifacts from the Luristan region in western Iran.

1935
Erich Schmidt directs his first excavation in Luristan and conducts aerial surveys in the mountainous region.

1938
Schmidt's second Luristan mission focuses on a site at Surkh Dum. The dig recovers more exquisite bronze artifacts.

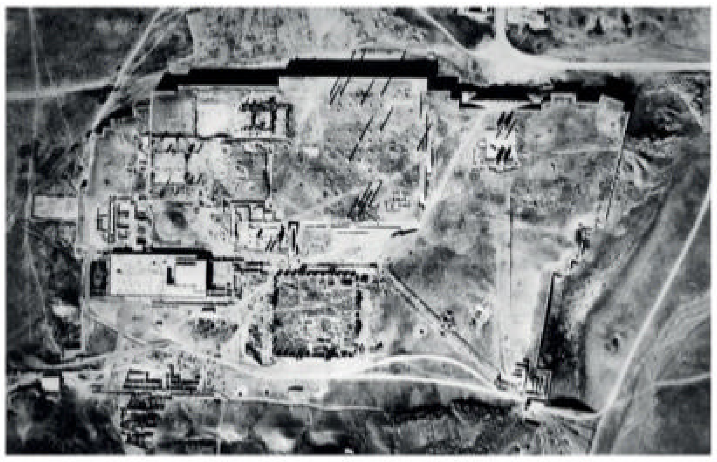
1965-1979
Finds by Ghent University and the Royal Museums of Brussels establish a chronology for the Luristan bronzes.

team explored Surkh Dum, a settlement site in Luristan. Prior to this dig, unauthorized excavations in the area resulted in the removal of many bronzes, resulting in the loss of valuable information about the site's history. Local authorities finally put a stop to the looting, and Schmidt focused his efforts on uncovering what remained.

Despite the damage and looting, Schmidt's team was able to recover bronze, ivory, and ceramic items, objects that revealed similar artistic techniques and styles to the bronzes that were being unearthed and sold in the 1920s. Much of the exploratory work at Surkh Dum centered around a multichambered structure that was believed to have been a temple or place of worship. Schmidt also recovered items from chambered tombs with stones placed vertically as walls and larger slabs as ceilings.

EYES IN THE SKY

SCHMIDT'S WORK made pioneering use of aerial photography in archaeology. Between 1935 and 1937, his team conducted the first aerial excavation surveys over western, southern, and northeastern Iran, including the site of Persepolis (below).



BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

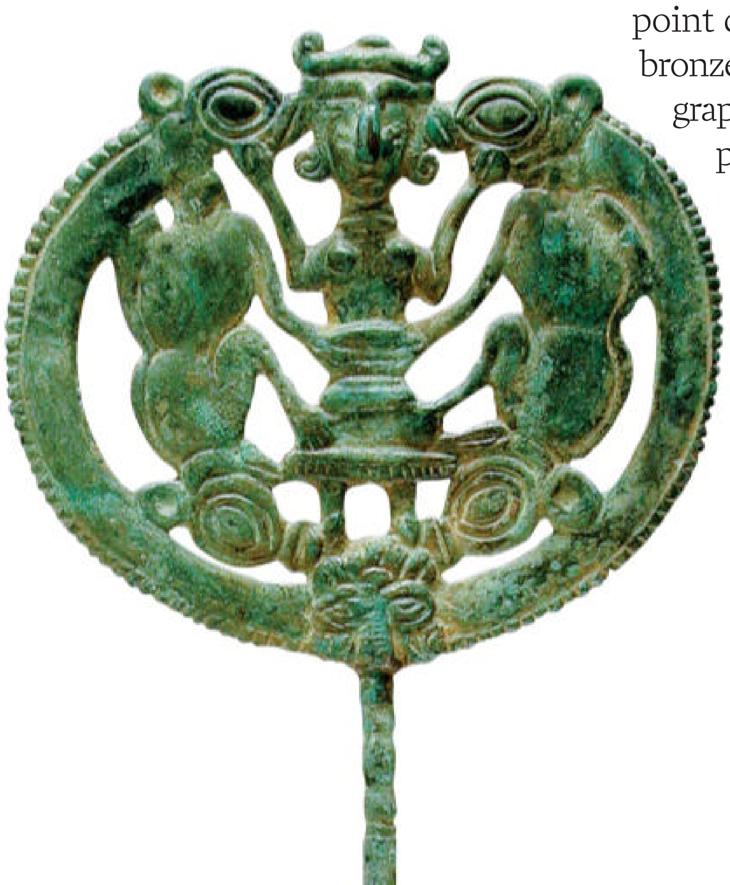
PANORAMA of the Kermanshah plain in western Iran, part of the historical region of Luristan, with its characteristic alternation of valleys and mountain ranges.

GEORG GERSTER/AGE FOTOSTOCK

Establishing a strong chronology for the Luristan bronzes has been challenging. The extensive looting destroyed much of the surrounding soil layers, or stratigraphy, that archaeologists rely on to establish occupation dates.

Only in recent decades has it been possible to pinpoint dates for the Luristan bronzes. Stylistic and iconographic analysis was complemented by a series of archaeological digs during the 1960s and 1970s. The excavations, carried out between 1965 and 1979 in western Luristan by Ghent University and the Royal Museums of Brussels, made it possible to locate a large number of collective tombs full of finds. Thanks to intact stratigraphy, these can be dated. Based on these studies, scholars can more accurately calculate when the Luristan bronzes were made, a timescale that is fixed at some point between the 11th century B.C. and the mid-seventh century B.C.—the so-called Late Iron Age of Luristan.

Male and female figures have been featured in "Master of Animals" artworks.



ANIMAL CONTROL. OPENWORK BRONZE PIN FROM LURISTAN, CIRCA 1000-650 B.C. LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

AKG/ALBUM

The identity of the people who fashioned these beautiful pieces remains uncertain. Candidates include the early Medes, an Indo-European group who lived in the area, while others advocate for the Cimmerians, a nomadic people who originated in southern Russia and may have moved into Luristan in the eighth century B.C.

Cuneiform inscriptions on swords found in the region suggest the Kassites, a people who settled in

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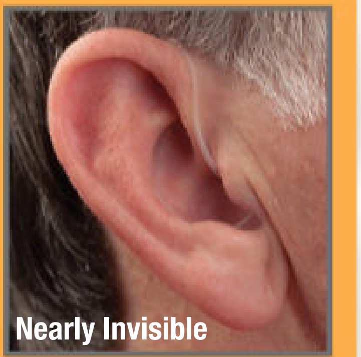

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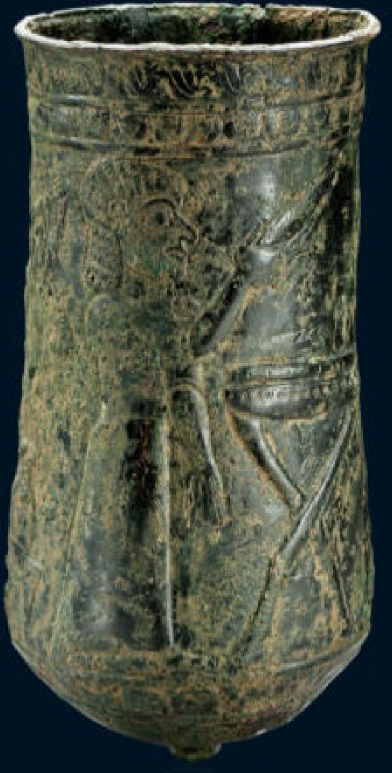
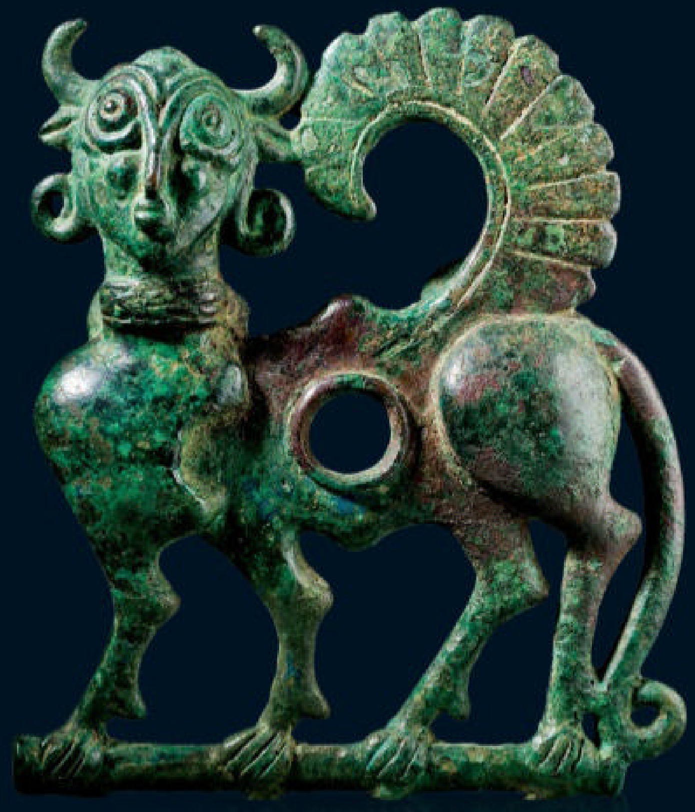
Beautiful Bronzes

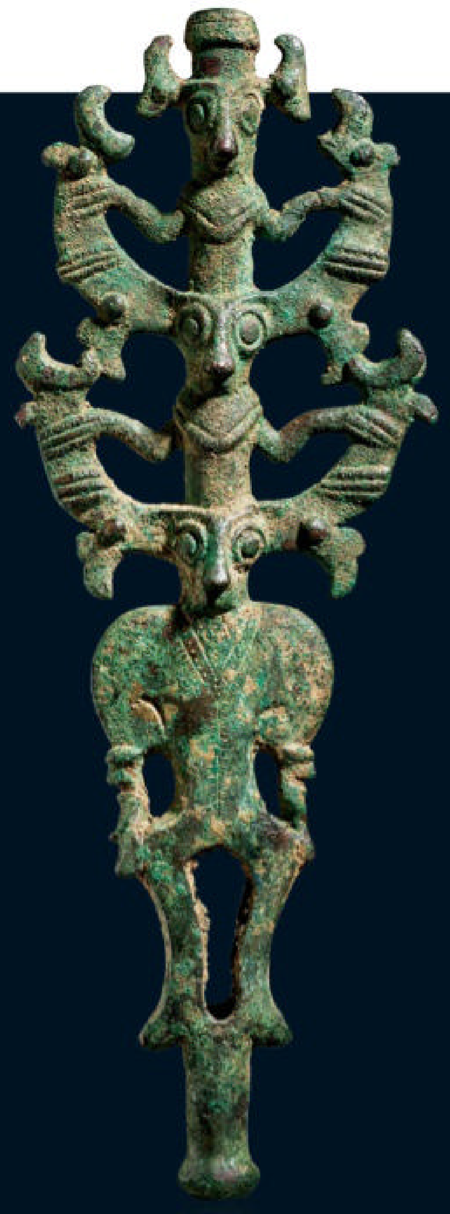
The exquisite metalwork displayed in the Luristan bronzes is reflected in the intricate details and fascinating subjects of each piece.



Dramatic scenes adorn the sides of beakers, while small nubs appear on the bottom. Circa 1000-800 B.C. Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Winged mythical beasts were popular subjects for the metal cheekpieces for horse harnesses. Circa 1000-650 B.C. Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Three human figures balance themselves and four goats on a standard. Circa 1000-650 B.C. Los Angeles County Museum of Art

ALL IMAGES: AKG/ALBUM

Luristan around the 16th century B.C. and then occupied central and southern Mesopotamia until sometime in the early 12th century B.C., were responsible.

Rich Images

An incredible variety of artifacts was discovered in Luristan, most falling into three major categories: the standards (or finials), metalwork from horse harnesses, and pins. Different kinds of bronze pieces have also been found—including weapons like daggers, spears, and axes—but not in the same abundance.

The standards are objects that were once fixed to the top of a staff. What makes them unique is their complex iconography taken from the animal world, in which the ibex (a species of mountain goat) is common. One of the best known and most fascinating variants is the so-called Master of Animals, which depicts a human figure (typically male, but female versions have been found) holding wild animals by the neck.

The kinds of animals vary, ranging from big cats or birds of prey to mythological beasts like griffins and sphinxes. The motif is common to other ancient civilizations: Master of Animals artworks have been found in Mesopotamian art as well as Sumerian. The motif is believed to symbolize human dominion over nature.

Magnificent horse-bit cheekpieces confirm the nomadic lifestyle of the people who fashioned them. As the archaeologist Paolo Matthiae has written: “The most frequently found item is the bit, decorated with two cheekpieces made of perforated plates with pictures of animals that had a large hole in their bellies, pierced by the bar of the bit.” The iconographic repertoire can include bulls, lions, and ibexes; in others, griffins and sphinxes.

There are also everyday objects. The best known are the pins, whose purpose is still debated. Some scholars think they were votive offerings, while others suggest a more practical purpose and they were used to fasten clothing. The pins feature a variety of subjects: goddesses, animals, and also the Master of Animals motif.

A final category are beakers, cylindrical vessels with a small nub on the base. The decoration, made in relief on the outside, includes scenes such as ritual banquets, with important figures flanked by servants or musicians.

—Antonio Ratti

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